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CONVERSATIONS

ON SOME OF

THE OLD POETS

BY

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

FRED LEWIS PATTEE

Professor of English in Pennsylvania State College

"Or, if I would delight my private hours
With music or with poem, where, so soon
As in our native language, can I find
That solace?"

PARADISE REGAINED

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TO

MY FATHER

CHARLES LOWELL, D.D.

WHOM, IF I HAD NOT THE

HIGHER PRIVILEGE OF REVERING AS A PARENT

I SHOULD STILL HAVE

HONORED AS A MAN AND LOVED AS A FRIEND

This Volume

CONTAINING MANY OPINIONS FROM WHICH HE WILL WHOLLY,

YET WITH THE

LARGE CHARITY OF A CHRISTIAN HEART, DISSENT

IS INSCRIBED BY HIS

YOUNGEST CHILD

"Hail, bards of mightier grasp! on you
I chiefly call, the chosen few,
Who cast not off the acknowledged guide,
Who faltered not, nor turned aside;
Whose lofty genius could survive
Privation, under sorrow thrive."

WORDSWORTH

TO THE READER.

A PREFACE is always either an apology or an explanation; and a good book needs neither. That I write one, then, proves that I am diffident of the merit of this volume, to a greater degree, even, than an author must necessarily be.

For the minor faults of the book the hurry with which it has been prepared must plead in extenuation, since it was in process of writing and printing at the same time, so that I could never estimate its proportions as a whole. This must excuse the too great length of the First Conversation, which I should have divided, had I known in time how it would have grown under my hands. Some repetitions may also occur, which I trust the candid reader will refer to the same exculpatory cause.

The substance of the two other Conversations appeared more than two years ago in the "Boston Miscellany," a magazine conducted by my friend, N. Hale, Jr., Esq. The articles, as then written, met with some approbation, and I had often been urged to reprint them by friends, with whose wishes it was as well my duty as my delight to comply. Yet I con-

fess I felt strongly reluctant in this matter; and my reluctance increased after looking over the articles, and seeing how imperfect they were.

It then occurred to me that, by throwing them into the form of conversations, greater freedom would be given them, and that discursiveness, which was their chief fault (among many others, of style), would find readier pardon. Some of the deepest, as well as the most delightful books, have been written in this form in our own language, not to speak of its prevalent use among the Greeks and Latins. I need only mention the names of Izaak Walton, Walter Savage Landor, and Horne Tooke, to recall to mind three of the most prominent among many English examples. [1]

I had no intention of giving them anything like a dramatic turn, and I trust I shall not so be censured. They are merely essays, divided in this way to allow them greater ease and frankness, and the privilege of wandering at will. That this license has not been carried to a greater degree than is warranted by the usual suggestiveness of conversation will, I trust, be conceded. If some of the topics introduced seem foreign to the subject I can only say that they are not so to my mind, and that an author's object in writing criticisms is not only to bring to light the beauties of the works he is considering, but also to express his own opinions upon those and other matters.

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[1] Among the pleasantest recent writings in this form, I would mention "The Philosophy of Mystery," by W. C. Dendy, M.D.

Wishing, as I did, to preserve, as far as possible unaltered, whatever had given pleasure to others in the articles as already written, I experienced many difficulties. It is impossible to weld cast-iron, and I had not time to melt it and recast it.

I am not bold enough to esteem these essays of any great price. Standing as yet only in the outer porch of life, I cannot be expected to report of those higher mysteries which lie unrevealed in the body of the temple. Yet, as a child, when he has found but a mean pebble, which differs from ordinary only so much as by a stripe of quartz or a strain of iron, calls his companions to behold his treasure, which to them also affords matter of delight and wonder; so I cannot but hope that my little findings may be pleasant, and haply instructive to some few.

An author's opinions should be submitted to no arbitration but that of solitude and his own conscience; but many defects and blemishes in his mode of expressing them may doubtless be saved him by submitting his work, before publication, to the judgment of some loving friend, — and if to the more refined eye of a woman, the better. But the haste with which these pages have been prepared and printed has precluded all but a very trifling portion of them from being judged by any eye save my own.

ELMWOOD, CAMBRIDGE, MASS.
Dec. 19, 1844.

INTRODUCTION.

To gain a true conception of the work of James Russell Lowell, one must recognize at the outset that he was first of all a poet. Poetry was his earliest passion; it ruled his youth; it modified his education; it turned him from his logical profession, and at length it forced itself upon him as his life-work. But the American muse in the thirties and forties had little to bestow save laurel. Not even a life of celibacy could be supported by poems alone, and Lowell, when he was scarcely of age, was helplessly in love and even engaged to a maiden in every way worthy of a poet's dreams. Prose had a commercial value; it was in demand, and perforce he turned to it for support. He wrote what may loosely be called literary criticism, but in reality it was but the appreciations of a young poet who under the elm trees during the long summer days had read eagerly all of the old poets from Theocritus to Keats.

Lowell's first endowment, aside from his love for truth and beauty, was sympathy. He entered intuitively into the soul of the old poets. Seldom in modern times have they had a more appreciative, a more discerning reader. His studies and appreciations found an eager audience. It was like looking through a Claude Lorraine glass into the soul of the

old masters to read his selections and his enthusiastic comments. Thus he became what for want of a better name we may call a critic. He wrote much; his prose sketches are scattered through all the reviews and miscellanies of the middle period.

As he grew older, as his outlook upon life and literature became broader and his mastery of his art more perfect, his critical studies increased in breadth and strength, but one cannot help noting that with each increase in critical power there was a corresponding decrease in lyric feeling, a falling away from the fine poetic quality of his early work. The odes of his later period, magnificent as they are, have not the lyric intensity and the spontaneous freshness that we might expect after his "first fine careless rapture." No man can serve two masters; the lyric muse can bide no rivals.

The critical and appreciative faculty in Lowell grew with use until it approached the bounds of fastidiousness, but he turned ever his most searching criticism upon his own work. Few writers anywhere have remodelled and excised their creations with more remorseless care. The final edition of his works, arranged and edited by his own hand during his maturest years, contains a surprisingly small portion of his entire literary product. No trace of his earlier prose is to be found in this final revision; the "Conversations on Some of the Old Poets" is omitted altogether; the numerous reviews and lectures and contributions to periodicals are nearly all missing, and even the few that were deemed worthy of inclu-

sion in the final edition have been so remodelled and pruned as often to resemble but little their earlier forms. The essay on "Rousseau," for instance, is the condensation of five or six lectures. All traces of early inexperience, of crudity, and of enthusiasm have been carefully removed. The edition is like Athena, who sprang in her full maturity and perfection from the head of Zeus.

While in many respects this is praiseworthy, in many other ways it is unfair and misleading. We cannot understand a writer in any full sense of the word unless we have his complete work and can study it in chronological order. We must be able to see the forces that moulded him; we must trace the evolution of his art, and what in the case of Lowell is more important, perhaps, we must estimate his influence at every step upon his contemporaries and his age. Thus any estimate of the poet is incomplete and misleading, and indeed unjust to Lowell himself, which does not give careful attention to his first significant prose creation, the "Conversations on Some of the Old Poets." As we read it we are admitted into the very workshop of the young poet; we study his methods and his ideals, his conception of poetry and his early training. Not only this, we can study through it the literary condition of America and estimate Lowell's influence at a critical period.

To understand fully the "Conversations" one must consider that it was the work of a poet in his twenty-sixth year; that it was published almost simultaneously with his marriage, and that its author knew

far more of the old poets than of actual life. He had been fortunate in his choice of ancestors and of birthplace; he had grown up in a scholarly and literary atmosphere; books had been his earliest companions; and his mother, a refined and sensitive soul, had breathed into him while he was yet in his cradle a passionate love for the old English ballads and songs. His essay, "Cambridge Thirty Years Ago," tells us of this early environment. No wonder he became an eager reader of the old poets and dramatists; no wonder that he haunted the alcoves of the Harvard library and read during all of his college course far more in the poets than in the prescribed studies. He was graduated when he was scarce twenty. Then for two years amid dreaming and reading he dallied with legal studies, and in the end he actually gained his degree from the Harvard Law School; but he had no heart in his work; poetry held full possession of him. Love furnished themes for his muse. He had become engaged before he was through with his law studies to Miss Maria White, herself a writer of verse and as beautiful a soul as even a young poet could conceive. But circumstances forbade an early marriage. Financial disaster had come suddenly upon his father, and the young dreamers were soon face to face with the old problem that has confronted so many poets and dreamers. He must fall back on his profession, much as he disliked it; he entered the law office of C. G. Loring, of Boston, but he wrote more sonnets than briefs. At the end of the year, in 1841, he published — the fruit of his early

legal practice — a volume of poems entitled, "A Year's Life." In May of the next year he wrote to a friend, "I am determined to leave a calling which I hate," and accordingly he was soon associated with Robert Carter, as proprietor of a new literary magazine, "The Pioneer." It died, however, a natural death after its third issue. America was not ready for it. He was now driven to his pen for support. He wrote voluminously; he contributed poems and sketches to every periodical that would advance even a meagre price. In December, 1843, he put forth his second volume of poems, and one year later, in the opening days of 1845, he issued his third volume, "Conversations on Some of the Old Poets."

The book is just what we might expect from the pen of a marvellously gifted young poet of twenty-six, who has read all of the poets, and who has deliberately dedicated himself to a literary life. It is full of enthusiasm, full of a youth's first intoxication with life and love and romantic song. It is more delightful in many respects than the more mature and weighty messages of his later days. It is more unstudied, more fresh, spontaneous, inspired; it is nearer to poetry, nearer to the throbbing heart of a man. It is like a walk on a spring morning. The generous young lover sees nothing but beauty and joy and promise. He seems to have no definite course; he turns wherever the impulse of the moment may call him. "The straight line," he declares, "is not the line of beauty. There is an oak wood a mile or two hence whither I often walk, but I never make

for it with the straightforward pertinacity of a turnpike. A clump of goldenrods or a sprig of succory is enough to draw me aside, and when I reach my oaks I bring them a heart more open and a keener sympathy. Once there I am not locked up in them, but seek out glimpses of landscape on every side."

This is a true statement of Lowell's critical method. The book touches upon every phase of English poetry. Lingering longest in the springtime periods, the poet dwells delightfully on Chaucer, Shakspeare, and Chapman; on Keats, Burns, and Wordsworth. A word or a hint turns his course. He characterizes with marvellous conciseness Milton, Marvell, Jeremy Taylor, Dryden, Pope, Gray, Leigh Hunt, Tennyson — in fact, all of the poets who had delighted him. He analyzes with insight the classical school, the Queen Anne writers, the Puritans, the basis of literary criticism, Napoleon, Byronism, the vagaries of fashion, abolitionism, the problem of death and immortality — indeed, the range of topics and the author's discursiveness are the first characteristics of the book to impress the reader. It has youth written upon every page; it is the notebook of a young man who has read widely and thoughtfully and who is ready to give his dictum on every subject. There is often a note of exaggeration and cocksureness in it. Philip speaks as one having authority; there is no peradventure in his criticism; he is the autocrat of the conversation. The dialogue form, which was evidently suggested by Eckermann and Landor, makes no addition to the value of the work.

The conversation is lifeless and artificial. It is but justice to the young author, however, to explain that he made no attempt to attain dramatic effect. He adopted the dialogue form simply to allow greater freedom for introducing all manner of material. Some of his opinions are immature and ill-considered. His later judgment sometimes reversed his verdicts. For instance, in his last days he could say of Ford, "I find that the greater part of what I once took on trust as precious is really paste and pinchbeck." Thus far one may criticise the book with confidence, but the careful reader is soon silent. He quickly forgets all minor defects, for the spontaneous enthusiasm of the generous young poet is contagious. He soon discovers that there is method even in his discursiveness, that the author had before him a main thesis that he never lost sight of.

Every revival of English song has been preceded by a defence of poetry. One needs mention only Puttenham's "Arte of English Poesy," Harrington's "Apology," and Sidney's "Defense," which preceded the Elizabethan outburst, or Shelley's "Defense of Poetry," Leigh Hunt's "What is Poetry?" and Wordsworth's "Prefaces" which preluded the later burst of English song. Lowell's "Conversations" was the defence of poesy which ushered in the great song era in America. Its message was clear and unmistakable. "It is time," the young poet cries, "to return to the poetic ideals of the old days when freedom and spontaneous utterance, sincerity and true earnestness prevailed; when poets cared

not a rush for fashions and models, but sang from their hearts." Despite his discursive methods, despite page after page of material that seems like the random jottings of an omnivorous reader, there may be found in the book one steady purpose, one dominant message: There must be a break completely and absolutely from the artificial methods that so long have bound English song; "Poetry is something to make us wiser and better, by continually revealing those types of beauty and truth which God has set in all men's souls;" "Nature should lead the true poet by the hand;" to such a one nothing is mean or unpoetic; verse and rhyme are not artificial and arbitrary things, — poetry should move as naturally as the winds and the waters; the poet is a prophet, he is inspired, and his message is spontaneous.

To illustrate his conception of poetry Lowell first made a study of Chaucer. The old master had not been appreciated at his full value, he maintained, simply because he had been read in classic versions. "Put no faith at all," he cried, "in any idea you may have got of Chaucer from Dryden or Pope." He would open the eyes of his generation to the real beauties of Chaucer. He dwells upon his sincerity and plainness, his originality and whole-hearted enthusiasm, his freshness and exuberance. "Reading him is like brushing through the dewy grass at sunrise. Everything is new and sparkling and fragrant." Skilfully he contrasts him with Pope, the high priest of artificiality, and with Byron, the type

of self-consciousness. He dwells upon his treatment of nature, and his democratic spirit, to which nothing honest was mean or unworthy of poetic treatment. "Nothing that God has thought it beneath him to make does he deem it beneath him to study and prove worthy of all admiration." The influence of Pope had been destructive of the true poetic spirit. It had tyrannized over even Wordsworth until it had warped and narrowed him. He had broken from the classic school by a system of reasoning, and had thus become a philosopher rather than a perfect lyrist, as nature had intended. "The old poets lived in too sincere an age, and were too truly independent to think independence a virtue. To try to be independent is to acknowledge slavery."

The true poet is a priest. He has an

> "Infantine,
> Familiar clasp of things divine."

"Reverence is the foundation of all poetry," and love is its superstructure. "The poet's heart is an unlighted torch which gives no help to his footsteps till love has touched it with flame." "God is not far from that heart to which man is near." From this standpoint Lowell criticises the Puritanic spirit and the modern church. There must be, he declares, a spiritual and religious revolution in America before a burst of true poetry is possible. Again he instances Chaucer, who was not a churchman, but who had in his heart all the essentials of true piety. "There was no intentional piety about Chaucer, no French

collar-and-wristband morality too common in our day," but he had a natural piety which was honest, and fearless, and true.

He further illustrates his ideal of poetry by a study of the Elizabethan dramatists. In them "there is the beauty of health, strength, and invincible sincerity." They wrote from the heart rather than from the intellect. "They wrote before the good English word *feeling* had whined itself into the French one *sentiment*." He chooses Chapman as a type, and shows to what heights he rises above "the dead marsh-level of Pope." "If Chapman be not classical he has the higher merit of earnestness, sincerity, and rugged heartiness." He selects Ford as an example, since there is "something grand and free about him." "He is marked by an abandoned earnestness, and willingness, and sincerity."

Everywhere in the book we catch this full, free atmosphere. The young poet can bide no restraint. To him poesy is as sacred as religion, as free as the hill winds, and as spontaneous as the songs of the spring birds. He believed with the unfettered Elizabethans "that Poesy demanded the enthralling and ennobling toil of a whole life, the heart, soul, will, life, everything, of those who professed her service." There was need to return to this old ideal, for English poetry had been dominated by the intellect until "Parnassus is now shrunk to a modern mountain; Hippocrene has dwindled to a scant rill."

Especially did the America of 1845 have need for this stirring message. The breath of that spring

morning which had fanned the cheeks of Burns and Wordsworth had been long in crossing the Atlantic. America had been too busy to dally with the poets. "It has become a mercantile world," complains the young enthusiast, "and if some murmur of the poet's song creep into the counting-room, it thinks of the insane asylum, and runs up another column of figures." Even the few who delighted in the poets had been taught to prefer the classical measures of Pope. John, who in the conversation serves as a foil for Philip, represents this class. "I confess," he declares after Philip has shown most convincingly the superior charms of the romantic singers, "I can hardly shake off the influence of early education in favor of the French school of poets." The few poets which America boasted at the end of the first half-century of our national life had broken but little from this influence. A few spontaneous notes there had been, but they had died away unappreciated. Freneau had spent his last years in obscurity; Bryant, to be sure, had won a considerable audience, but it was chiefly because of the cold and classic beauty of his verse. In the late thirties even the imitators had ceased to be heard. It was a period of poetic darkness, but it happily proved to be the darkness before the sunrise. Soon America was to ring with a joyous matin chorus. The influence of Lowell at this critical moment in schooling his countrymen in poetic art, in making them appreciate the burst of song when once it came, and in directing the chorus so that it echoed few of the classic chords can hardly

be over-estimated. What Longfellow did at this period in acquainting America with German sentimental poetry, and what Felton accomplished in introducing the Greek poets, Lowell may fairly be said to have done in bringing to his countrymen a new conception of the old masters of romantic song. "The Conversations on Some of the Old Poets" is thus a landmark in the history of American poetry.

Then, too, the book has a real value as a document showing the evolution of Lowell's critical method. He began as a poet rather than as a critic. He cared not at all to be scientific, to analyze in cold blood, to trace the genesis and evolution of a poet's art. He aimed at the heart, not at the intellect. A poem to him was notable just in proportion as it had power to move him, and he judged his comment upon it to be effective just in proportion as it had power to move the feelings of his hearers. "Taste is the next gift to genius," he declared. "Taste is the first great requisite of a critic. Learning, ingenuity, and boldness are merely its handmaidens." He has nothing but scorn for him who "would confidently reduce Art to a chessboard, upon which all the combinations are mathematically calculable and exhaustible." It was enough simply to praise and interpret what one's taste declared to be good: "The only safe method is to point out what parts of a poem please the critic, and let the rest go."

This poetic basis of Lowell's criticism is the cause of his discursiveness. The poetic mind is not scien-

tific and direct, it is impressionistic and erratic. He would write of the dramatist Ford, but he makes no gradual historical approach to him; he simply points out what in Ford has most impressed him. Furthermore, less than one-third of the paper has any connection with the subject proposed in the title. Even in his latest essays Lowell was fond of wandering far afield, and of following to its end every delightful by-path. The poetic basis of his criticism accounts, too, for the vast amount of figurative language in his prose work. In a space of several pages in the "Conversations" there is but one plain sentence. He delighted in metaphors. "A metaphor," he declared, "if the correspondence be perfect in all its parts, is one of the safest guides through the labyrinth of truth." The more frequent the figures the nearer to poetry, for it is the prime mission of poetry to show analogies between the seen and the unseen, between the material and the spiritual, between the human and the divine. How like a lyric poem is his criticism of Chaucer commencing, "There is in him the exuberant freshness and greenness of spring. Everything he touches leaps into full blossom." His figures are always fresh and original, always illuminating: "When Chaucer describes his shipman we seem to smell tar." "In Chaucer's poetry the humor is playing all the time round the horizon like heat lightning." "He loved speculation, and when he was running down some theological dogma, he does not mind leaping the church inclosure and pursuing his prey till it takes refuge under the cassock of the

priest himself." One may safely quote almost at random. A droll humor of the "Biglow Papers" type crops out often in his figures, sometimes broad and evident, sometimes sly and sarcastic. "Diplomatists," he explains in one place, "are like the two Yankees who swapped jackknives together till each had cleared five dollars."

Thus the first prose work of Lowell was a highly influential and significant book. Crude it may be in places, but its very crudity is one of its charms. It is fresh and spontaneous, full of a young man's whole-souled enthusiasm, full of the breath of the spring morning, when it was written. No true lover of poetry can afford to leave it unread, for it contains much that is worthy of Lowell in his best days, and over it there hangs the radiant morning glow that brings it almost into the region of true poesy.

FRED LEWIS PATTEE.

MARCH, 1901.

CONVERSATIONS.

FIRST CONVERSATION.

CHAUCER.

JOHN.

HERE you are, I see, as usual, ramparted around with musty volumes of the old poets. I remember how you used to pore over them in the college library. Are you not afraid that the wheels of your mind will get choked with the dust that rises out of these dry mummy-pits ?

PHILIP.

Even if I were to allow the justice of your last metaphor, I could reply that the dust is at least that of kings. You must remember, also, that even this dust is not without its uses. The rich brown pigment which our painters use is made out of it, — another material illustration of the spiritual truth, that nothing which ever had a meaning for mankind loses it by the lapse of years.

JOHN.

It may, however, become so overgrown with moss as hardly to repay the labor of the restoring chisel. But to return to our mummies. Our modern poets seem fully aware of the fact that what is true of one art is true also of all the others. They are as fond of using this coloring, made out of dead men's bones, as the painters. One must be turning at every other stanza to his glossary in order to understand them, so full are they of archaisms. They seem to have plagiarized from the cheesemongers, who inoculate their new cheeses with a bit of mould to give them the flavor of old ones.

PHILIP.

An imitation of style is one thing; the use of the same material is quite another. The marble of Pentelicus may be carved into other shapes as noble as the Phœbus or the Jupiter. It has no prejudice in favor of the Greek mythology; and Hiram Powers, I fancy, can persuade it to look godlike even in a coat and pantaloons. Language is the marble in which the poet carves; and if he find that which the old poets used aptest to his hand, let him not mar his work from an idle prejudice in favor of the quarries of Berkshire or Vermont. You find no fault with Crawford's "Orpheus," which sends you to your Lemprière, as you complain that the modern poets do to your glossary. Yet that statue is the more guilty of the two; for that is an attempt to resuscitate the Greek spirit, while these only use what they

think the best material in which to convey an idea of to-day. Pericles would be the fittest critic of that; but one of our old dramatists would soon find himself beyond his depth in these.

JOHN.

You have touched me in a tender spot. I admit that the fault is not confined to our poets. Our sculptors run to Greece, and our painters to Italy. Our Quincy stonecutters, in their Corinthian columns, show almost as much originality of design. I have seen portraits of New York ladies after the Fornarina, and the Washington in our State house has borrowed the toga of Fabius to hide his continental uniform with. This is what is called being classical; and it is so indeed, after "the high Roman fashion;" for the Romans plundered a temple of its gold and its gods at the same time, stealing the ideas as well as the freedom of the nation they subjugated. This gave point to the saying of one of their countrymen, that Greece had made a slave of her conqueror. I see the distinction you would make between the poets and their brother artists, but I am not yet ready to admit its justice.

PHILIP.

If you have seen the distinction, you have already admitted its justice. I would find no fault with the painter who should draw the Virgin with a glory about her head, for that is as easily credible now as in Giotto's day. The intellect may be skeptical, but the heart will believe any beautiful miracle in behalf

of what it loves or reveres; and the heart, after all, will have the last word in such matters. So the naked figure is in itself beautiful, but that would be no apology for putting Franklin's head upon the shoulders of the Antinous. Yet there are examples enough of such foolishness. Our artists seem to think that none but a Greek or Roman costume is admissible at the court of posterity. Yet posterity is delighted to greet Burns in his clouted shoon, and I am sure would never receive Washington (who knew better) in the indecent undress of a Roman statue. With our poets the case is different. They have adopted the style of those who used our noble language ere it had been crossed with the French. The dialect, too, which was contemporary with our translation of the Bible, will, for that reason, if for no other, carry a greater solemnity with it than that of any later period. The English of that day is racy with the old Saxon idiom, which was dear to the mass of the people, and which still maintains its gripe upon all the natural feelings with which poetry has most to do. Forms and conventionalities put on, as a matter of course, the court dress of the Norman conquerors; but the heart clung sturdily to its old Saxon homespun, and felt the warmer for it. You talk about the golden age of Queen Anne. It was a French pinchbeck age.

JOHN.

Stay, not so fast. I like the writers of that period for the transparency of their style and their freedom

from affectation. If I may trust my understanding of your meaning, our modern versifiers have only made the simple discovery that an appearance of antiquity is the cheapest passport to respect. But the cheapest which we purchase with subservience is too dear. You yourself have no such prejudice against the Augustan age of English literature. I have caught you more than once with the "Tatler" in your hand, and have heard you praising Dryden's prefaces.

PHILIP.

You and I have very different notions of what poetry is, and of what its object should be. You may claim for Pope the merit of an envious eye, which could turn the least scratch upon the character of a friend into a fester, of a nimble and adroit fancy, and of an ear so niggardly that it could afford but one invariable *cæsura* to his verse; but when you call him poet, you insult the buried majesty of all earth's noblest and choicest spirits. Nature should lead the true poet by the hand, and he has far better things to do than to busy himself in counting the warts upon it, as Pope did. A cup of water from Hippocrene, tasting, as it must, of innocent pastoral sights and sounds, of the bleat of lambs, of the shadows of leaves and flowers that have leaned over it, of the rosy hands of children whose privilege it ever is to paddle in it, of the low words of lovers who have walked by its side in the moonlight, of the tears of the poor Hagars of the world who have drunk from it, would choke a satirist. His thoughts

of the country must have a savor of Jack Ketch, and see no beauty but in a hemp-field. Poetry is something to make us wiser and better, by continually revealing those types of beauty and truth which God has set in all men's souls; not by picking out the petty faults of our neighbors to make a mock of. Shall that divine instinct, which has in all ages concerned itself only with what is holiest and fairest in life and nature, degrade itself to go about seeking for the scabs and ulcers of the putridest spirits, to grin over with a derision more hideous even than the pitiful quarry it has moused at? Asmodeus's gift of unroofing the dwellings of his neighbors at will would be the rarest outfit for a satirist, but it would be of no worth to a poet. To the satirist the mere outward motives of life are enough. Vanity, pride, avarice, these and the other external vices are the strings of his unmusical lyre. But the poet need only unroof his own heart. All that makes happiness or misery under every roof of the wide world, whether of palace or hovel, is working also in that narrow yet boundless sphere. On that little stage the great drama of life is acted daily. There the creation, the tempting, and the fall may be seen anew. In that withdrawing-closet solitude whispers her secrets, and death uncovers his face. There sorrow takes up her abode, to make ready a pillow and a resting place for the weary head of love, whom the world casts out. To the poet nothing is mean, but everything on earth is a fitting altar to the supreme beauty.

But I am wandering. As for the poets of Queen

Anne's reign, it is enough to prove what a kennel standard of poetry was then established, that Swift's smutchy verses are not even yet excluded from the collections. What disgusting stuff, too, in Prior and Parnell! Yet Swift, perhaps, was the best writer of English whom that period produced. Witness his prose. Pope treated the English language as the image-man has served the bust of Shakspeare yonder. To rid it of some external soils he has rubbed it down till there is no muscular expression left. It looks very much as his own "mockery king of snow" must have done after it had begun to melt. Pope is forever mixing water with the good old mother's milk of our tongue. You cannot get a straightforward speech out of him. A great deal of his poetry is so incased in verbiage that it puts me in mind of those important-looking packages which boys are fond of sending to their friends. We unfold envolope after envelope, and at last find a couple of cherry-stones. But in Pope we miss the laugh which in the other case follows the culmination of the joke. He makes Homer lisp like the friar in Chaucer, and Ajax and Belinda talk exactly alike.

JOHN.

Well, we are not discussing the merits of Pope, but of the archaisms which have been introduced into modern poetry. What you say of the Bible has some force in it. The forms of speech used in our version of it will always impress the mind, even if applied to an entirely different subject. What else can you bring forward?

PHILIP.

Only the fact that by going back to the more natural style of the Elizabethan writers our verse has gained in harmony as well as strength. No matter whether Pope is describing the cane of a fop or the speech of a demigod, the pause must always fall on the same syllable, and the sense be chopped off by the same rhyme. Achilles cannot gallop his horses round the walls of Troy, with Hector dragging behind his chariot, except he keep time to the immitigable seesaw of the couplet.

JOHN.

But all verse and rhyme are as artificial as you say Pope's *cæsura* is. Conceive of Macbeth, a monarch who classed "fools, minstrels, and bards" together in one penal enactment, delivering himself in blank verse![1]

PHILIP.

Shakspeare knew better than he did how he ought to have talked. But I do not agree with you that either rhyme or verse is unnatural. Some of our thoughts refuse to be written except in rhyme, and in the hands of a true poet this is no hindrance, but the rhyme seems always to have a meaning of its own, and to add to, or at least confirm, the sentiment. Metre and rhyme are like the skin of the grape. The thought is the pulp. The one is needed

[1] See Bellenden's translation of Boece's "Chron." The historian adds, "Thir and siclik lawis war usit ɒy King Makbeth; throw quhilk he governit the realme X ȝeris *in gud justice.*"

to hold the other firmly together in a compact and beautiful shape. We may throw it away, if we will; but often the chief spirit and flavor of the fruit is to be pressed out of it.

Without doubt, the fittest vehicle for grave and stately thoughts is the blank verse, and that has not been improved in the dramatic form since the old dramatists, nor in the epic since Milton. Wordsworth has been satisfied with giving us fresh combinations of thought, and with reasserting the dignity and worth of the poet's calling. As far as metre is concerned, he is the least original of writers. He has imitated all our masters in turn. In his sonnets he has sometimes emulated successfully the condensed gravity of Milton; but his blank verse seldom rises to the majestic level of his great precursor. He oftener reminds us of Cowper, who introduced a new and more conversational manner. Milton's verse suggests nothing meaner than the ocean; Cowper's has that easy dignity which does not become trivial, even when it describes the simmering of the tea-kettle. I think that Keats saw deeper into the mystery of this noble metre than any modern poet. Tennyson has, perhaps, added another grace to it.

JOHN.

You attribute a greater state and importance not only to the poet's art, but even to the mere mechanical details of it, than I should be willing to allow. You sometimes remind me of that sect of sonneteers whom Charles Lamb, in a letter to Coleridge, hu-

morously describes as attributing a mystical importance to a capital O. You have, however, the great mass of the critics with you, who usually pay more heed to the material than to the idea which it conveys, and who do not scruple to break off the nose from a statue, and present it to you as a proof of the excellence of the marble. Beauty of form, correctness of outline, and aptness for use (which last, indeed, demands the other two) seem to be of no account with them. Is it mahogany or veneering? is the question with them, and they settle the matter by a slash with their penknives.

PHILIP.

The zest with which you ran down your last metaphor persuades me that you agree with me at heart. The great poets, it is true, have not usually at first received the *imprimatur* of the critics; for it demands more labor and more faith than they have to spare, to get at the secret of anything that is greatly worth. We must wrestle with these messengers of heaven, as Jacob did, ere we obtain their blessing; and then they sometimes make a slave of our judgment, so that we halt for it ever after. Richter has lamed Carlyle a little.

JOHN.

All great ideas come to us, at first, like the gods of Homer, enveloped in a blinding mist; but to him whom their descent to earth concerns, to him who stands most in need of their help, the cloud becomes luminous and fragrant, and betrays the divinity

behind it. At present, these old poets of yours are in the cloudy state to me. Perhaps you can show me that I also am included in the benefit of their errand. Perhaps you can justify to me, out of their mouths, what now seems to me your extravagant estimate of the rank which belongs to poetry.

PHILIP.

Before attempting it, let me add something which occurs to me on the subject of a metrical disposition of our words. Whether it be an argument in its favor or not, I shall not take upon myself to say. At least, the reflection has been forced upon me many times, and not without some touch of painfulness. Even in my slight commerce with society, I have been obliged to notice a certain bashfulness which seems to clog men in the utterance of a noble or generous thought. We have become such ephemerides, such hangers-on of King To-day, that we seem hasty to smother, with a judicious cough, any allusion to our dethroned monarch, God. A harmless kind of dinner-table loyalty, like that of the old Jacobites, may be winked at; but thorough piety, which is the element wherein all good thought and action can alone subsist, is quite out of fashion. Now verse seems to furnish men with a sufficient apology for giving way to their holy enthusiasm. It is the politician's vocation to give us only homœopathic doses of truth, a grain of the medicine to a whole Niagara of water and froth. The priest is fashioned by his hearers, and is too often rather the

pillow of down for their consciences than the conductor of the arrowy lightnings of God's wrath. He values Christ's words at more than his heart, and will denounce what he, but not what his doctrines, condemned. He remembers his meekness, and takes care to forget the whip of small cords. But the poet can echo the eternal harmonies in the very face of the prodigal world, without winking or stammering. The tar is always hot and the feather-bed ready unripped for him who utters his conscience in plain prose; but there is a charm in verse, which saves scathless the preacher of those most ancient doctrines which are termed new whenever they are revived. George Herbert says,

> "A verse may find him who a sermon flies,
> And turn delight into a sacrifice."

JOHN.

Your notion is a fanciful one. It is only because the poet is nearer to a state of nature in spiritual things than other men, and because his natural instinct for truth is keener, that he is the master of a more inspired utterance. We stupidly call the life of savages a state of nature, as if Nature loved our bestial qualities better than our divine ones. The condition of the poet may be more truly named so, in whom the highest refinement of civilization consists with the utmost simplicity of the unblunted spiritual instincts. He is weatherwise in the signs of Providence. The dense, hot air, which foretells the coming earthquake of a revolution in the moral

world, grows painful to his lungs, while other men can yet breathe freely in it. Trifles, which other natures pass by unheeded, are to him unerring finger-posts. He can trace God's footsteps by a broken twig or a misplaced leaf. But, after all, it is only the music of the verse and not the mere form of verse itself that makes the poet's truths more welcome. Music understands all languages, and she interprets between him and his hearers. You see I have been tearing a leaf out of your own book. The truth is that the world cares very little about the matter. It has become a mercantile world, and if some murmur of the poet's song creep into the counting-room, it thinks of the insane asylum and runs up another column of figures. But when a rude fellow pushes in, and becomes downright abusive in every-day speech, and gives the respectable world the lie without scruple, why then, if the constable be not at hand, a writ of trespass is sued out in Judge Lynch's court! So, too, of the preacher. The world goes to church to be quiet, and takes it amiss to be interrupted in a calculation of the price of cotton by a personal reference to any of its own bosom sins. The world has engaged the preacher to abuse the Scribes and Pharisees, and not to be looking too nicely after its own conscience. The world believes firmly that the whole race of Scribes and Pharisees was dead and buried two thousand years ago, and sees no harm in being a little severe upon their foibles, especially as there are no surviving relatives whose feelings can be set on edge by it. But let us come back to the poets.

PHILIP.

With all my heart. You smile when my hobby takes the bit between his teeth, but seem unconscious of your own John Gilpin excursions. My first thought was to have read you only some passages from the Elizabethan dramatists; but I have changed my mind. I remember hearing you say that the obsoleteness of Chaucer's dialect had deterred you from the attempt to read him.

JOHN.

Yes, I was desirous of a further acquaintance with a poet whom Dryden and Pope esteemed worthy of their toil in translating. But he is impregnably hemmed in from me by a quickset hedge of obscure and antiquated phrases.

PHILIP.

So it seems at first sight. But if you had the stout heart of the prince in the fairy tale, you would soon have broken the charm, and would have found the deserted old palace suddenly full of all the noise and bustle of every-day employment, as well as the laughter and tears of every-day life. You must put no faith at all in any idea you may have got of Chaucer from Dryden or Pope. Dryden appreciated his original better than Pope; but neither of them had a particle of his humor, nor of the simplicity of his pathos. The strong point in Pope's displays of sentiment is in the graceful management of a cambric handkerchief. You do not believe a word that

Heloïse says, and feel all the while that she is squeezing out her tears as if from a half-dry sponge. Pope was not a man to understand the quiet tenderness of Chaucer, where you almost seem to hear the hot tears falling, and the simple, choking words sobbed out. I know no author so tender as he, not even Shakspeare. There is no declamation in his grief. Dante is scarcely more downright and plain. To show you how little justice Dryden has done him, I will first read you a few lines from his version of "The Knight's Tale," and then the corresponding ones of the original. It is the death scene of Arcite.

"Conscience (that of all physic works the last)
Caused him to send for Emily in haste.
With her, at his desire, came Palamon;
Then, on his pillow raised, he thus begun:
'No language can express the smallest part
Of what I feel and suffer in my heart
For you, whom best I love and value most;
But to your service I bequeath my ghost;
Which, from this mortal body when untied,
Unseen, unheard, shall hover at your side,
Nor fright you waking, nor your sleep offend,
But wait officious, and your steps attend;
How I have loved! excuse my faltering tongue;
My spirit's feeble and my pains are strong;
This I may say: I only grieve to die,
Because I lose *my charming Emily*.'"

JOHN.

I am quite losing my patience. The sentiment of Giles Scroggins and the verse of Blackmore!

Surely, nothing but the meanest servility to his original could excuse such slovenly workmanship as this.

PHILIP.

There is worse to come. Of its fidelity as a translation you can judge for yourself when you hear Chaucer.

"'To die when Heaven had put you in my power,
Fate could not choose a more malicious hour!
What greater curse could envious Fortune give
Than just to die when I began to live?
Vain men, how vanishing a bliss we crave!
Now warm in love, now withering in the grave!
Never, O, never more to see the sun!
Still dark in a damp vault, and still alone!
This fate is common.' "

I wish you especially to bear in mind the lines I have emphasized. Notice, too, how the rhyme is impertinently forced upon the attention throughout. We can hardly help wondering if a nuncupatory testament were ever spoken in verse before. There is none of this French-lustre in Chaucer.

"Arcite must die;
For which he sendeth after Emily,
And Palamon, that was his cousin dear;
Then spake he thus, as ye shall after hear:
'Ne'er may the woful spirit in my heart
Declare one point of all my sorrow's smart,
To you, my lady, that I love the most;
But I bequeath the service of my ghost
To you aboven any cre-a-ture,
Since that my life may now no longer dure.

Alas, the woe! alas, the pains so strong,
That I for you have suffered, — and so long!
Alas, the death! alas, mine Emily!
Alas, the parting of our company!
Alas, my heart's true queen! alas, my wife!
My heart's dear lady, ender of my life!
What is this world? What asketh man to have?
Now with his love, — now in his cold, cold grave,
Alone, withouten any company!
Farewell, my sweet! farewell, mine Emily!
And softly take me in your armès twey (two arms),
For love of God, and hearken what I say.' "

JOHN.

Perfect! I would not have a word changed, except the second "cold" before "grave." It takes away from the simplicity, and injures the effect accordingly. In the lines just before that I could fancy that I heard the dying man gasp for breath. After hearing this, Dryden's exclamation-marks savor of the play-bills, where one sees them drawn up in platoons, as a body-guard to the name of an indifferent player, their number being increased in proportion as the attraction diminishes. And in that seemingly redundant line,

"Alone, withouten any company,"

how does the repetition and amplification give force and bitterness to the thought, as if Arcite must need dwell on his expected loneliness, in order to feel it fully! There is nothing here about "*charming* Emily," "envious Fortune," no bandying of com-

pliments. Death shows to Arcite, as he does mostly to those who are cut off suddenly in the May-time and blossom of the senses, as a bleak, bony skeleton, and nothing more. Dryden, I remember, in his "Art of Poetry" says,

> "Chaucer alone, fixed on this solid base,
> In his old style conserves a modern grace;
> Too happy, if the freedom of his rhymes
> Offended not the method of our times."

But if what you have read (unless you have softened it greatly) be a specimen of his rudeness, save us from such "method" as that of Dryden!

PHILIP.

I hardly changed a syllable. The word to which you objected, as redundant, was an addition of my own to eke out the measure, "coldè" being pronounced as two syllables in Chaucer's time. The language of the heart never grows obsolete or antiquated, but falls as musically from the tongue now as when it was first uttered. Such lustiness and health of thought and expression seldom fail of leaving issue behind them. One may trace a family likeness to these in many of Spenser's lines, and I please myself sometimes with imagining pencil-marks of Shakspeare's against some of my favorite passages in Chaucer. At least, the relationship may be traced through Spenser, who calls Chaucer his master, and to whom Shakspeare pays nearly as high a compliment.

JOHN.

I suppose you refer to the sonnet, usually printed with his, but now generally ascribed to some one else.

PHILIP.

To Barnaby Barnes; but hardly, I would fain believe, on sound authority. At any rate, there is enough in Shakspeare's earlier poems to prove that he admired Spenser fully to the measure of that sonnet. I know nothing more full of delight and encouragement than to trace the influence of one great and true spirit upon another. It adds to the dignity of both, and gives our love for them a nobler argument. How must Chaucer have become, for a moment, sweetly conscious of his laurel, even in paradise, at hearing his name spoken reverently by Spenser and Milton and Wordsworth!

JOHN.

I doubt if we were out of purgatory by the time Spenser wrote. You would pardon anything to a poet whom you love, and imagine him in paradise forthwith, when very likely his teeth are chattering on this side of the door. Chaucer had his sins to answer for.

PHILIP.

Nay, I fancy that if the priests, whose cassocks he stripped from their shoulders, had the arrangement of the afterpiece, we must look for him where his bays will hardly keep him cool. It is true that I would pardon more to a poet, because he needs par-

don the most. If he be not excellent, he needs it because he has keener perceptions of goodness; and if he be sinful, he needs it because his temptation to evil is in like manner stronger, and his own imagination sometimes unlocks a postern for vice to enter at. God does not weigh criminality in our scales. We have one absolute standard, with the seal of authority upon it; and with us an ounce is an ounce and a pound a pound. If we have winked while Bigotry and Superstition were tampering with the weights, adding a little to one and stealing as much from another, to suit their convenience, it is our own fault. But God's measure is the heart of the offender, — a balance which varies with every one of us, a balance so delicate that a tear cast in the other side may make the weight of error kick the beam. The recording angel had but little trouble in footing Chaucer's account. The uncleanness of his age has left a smooch here and there upon his poems; but it is only in the margin, and may be torn off without injury to the text. His love of beauty was too sincere not to have made him truly pious. It was not a holyday dress, folded up and lavendered for one day in the week; but his singing-robe, which he wore into the by-lanes and hovels of every-day life.

JOHN.

After all, your Chaucer was a satirist, and you should, in justice, test him with the same acid which you applied so remorselessly to Pope.

PHILIP.

Chaucer's satire is of quite another complexion. A hearty laugh and a thrust in the ribs are his weapons. He makes fun of you to your face, and even if you wince a little, you cannot help joining in his mirth. He does not hate a vice because he has a spite against the man who is guilty of it. He does not cry, "A rat i' the arras!" and run his sword through a defenceless old man behind it. But it is not for his humor, nor, indeed, for any one quality, that our old Chaucer is dear and sacred to me. I love to call him *old* Chaucer. The farther I can throw him back into the past, the dearer he grows; so sweet is it to mark how his plainness and sincerity outlive all changes of the outward world. Antiquity has always something reverend in it. Even its most material and perishable form, which we see in pyramids, cairns, and the like, is brooded over by a mysterious presence which strangely awes us. Whatever has been hallowed by the love and pity, by the smiles and tears of men, becomes something more to us than the moss-covered epitaphs of a buried age. There was a meaning in the hieroglyphics which Champollion could not make plainer. It is only from association with Man that anything seems old. The quarries of the Nile may be coeval with the planet itself, yet it is only the still fresh dints of the Coptic chisel that gift them with the spell of ancientness. Let but the skeleton of a man be found among the remains of those extinct antediluvian monsters, and straightway

that which now claimed our homage, as a triumph of comparative anatomy, shall become full of awe and mystery, and dim with the gray dawnlight of time. Once, from those shapeless holes, a human soul looked forth upon its huge empire of past and future. Once, beneath those crumbling ribs, beat a human heart, that seeming narrow isthmus between time and eternity, wherein there was yet room for hope and fear, and love and sorrow, to dwell, with all their wondrous glooms and splendors. Before, we could have gone no farther back than Cuvier. Those mighty bones of ichthyosauri and plesiosauri seemed rather a record of his energy and patience than of a living epoch in earth's history. Now, how modern and of to-day seem Memnon and Elephanta! If there be a venerableness in any outward symbols, in which rude and dumb fashion the soul of man first strove to utter itself, how much more is there in the clearer and more inspired sentences of ancient lawgivers and poets!

JOHN.

You have contrived very adroitly to get the Deluge between us. I shall not attempt the perilous navigation to your side, and can only wish you a safe return to mine. Camoëns swam ashore from a shipwreck with the Lusiad in his teeth; and I hope you will do as much for Chaucer. I long to hear more of him.

PHILIP.

It would be easier for me to emulate Waterton's ride on the alligator's back, and make an extempore

steed of the most tractable-looking ichthyosaurus I can lay hands on. However, here I am safely back again. But before I read you anything more from Chaucer, I must please myself by praising him a little more. His simplicity often reminds me of Homer; but, except in the single quality of *invention*, I prefer him to the Ionian. Yet we must remember that he shares this deficiency with Shakspeare, who scarcely ever scrupled to run in debt for his plots.

JOHN.

I cannot allow any poverty in Shakspeare. Writing, as he did, with hardly any aim beyond an immediate effect upon the stage, he instinctively felt how much easier it was to interest his audience in real characters, and in stories with which they were familiar. Invent the most ingenious plots for plays and pantomimes, and give all the advantage of more exuberant decoration, yet the old stories of the Forty Thieves and Jack the Giant-killer will win the unanimous verdict of the nursery.

PHILIP.

I do not believe that Shakspeare never thought of posterity, nor that any man was ever endowed with marvellous powers without being conscious of it, and desiring to make them felt. No man of genius was ever so fully appreciated by contemporaries as to make him forget the future. A poet must needs be before his own age to be even with posterity. There will, it is true, always be an uncomfortable simper

and constraint about a man who is aware of the presence of a living audience. But when he appeals to the future, he selects his hearers wholly from the noble and magnanimous; and there is a grandeur in the eyes that look upon him which renders anything but sincerity and great-mindedness impossible. There is ample proof in Shakspeare's sonnets, the most private and personal record of himself which he has left us, and in the care with which he corrected his plays, that he wrote more for readers than for play-goers. But we must come back to Chaucer. There is in him the exuberant freshness and greenness of spring. Everything he touches leaps into full blossom. His gladness and humor and pathos are irrepressible as a fountain. Dam them with a prosaic subject, and they overleap it in a sparkling cascade that turns even the hindrance to a beauty. Choke them with a tedious theological disquisition, and they bubble up forthwith, all around it, with a delighted gurgle. There is no cabalistic Undine-stone or seal of Solomon that can shut them up forever. Reading him is like brushing through the dewy grass at sunrise. Everything is new and sparkling and fragrant. He is of kin to Belphœbe, whose

> "Birth was of the womb of morning dew,
> And her conception of the joyous prime."

I speak now of what was truly Chaucer. I strip away from him all that belonged to the time in which he lived, and judge him only by what belongs equally to all times. There is no nebulosity of senti-

ment about him, no insipid vagueness in his sympathies. His first merit, the chief one in all art, is sincerity. He does not strive to body forth something which shall have a meaning; but, having a clear meaning in his heart, he gives it as clear a shape. Sir Philip Sydney was of his mind, when he bade poets look into their own hearts and write. He is the most unconventional of poets, and the frankest. If his story be dull, he rids his hearers of all uncomfortable qualms by being himself the first to yawn. He would have fared but ill in our day, when the naked feelings are made liable to the penalties of an act for indecent exposure. Very little care had he for the mere decencies of life. Were he alive now, I can conceive him sending a shudder through St. James's Coffeehouse, by thrusting his knife into his mouth; or making all Regent Street shriek for hartshorn, by giving a cab-driver as good as he sent, in a style to have pleased old Burton. The highest merit of a poem is that it reflects alike the subject and the poet. It should be neither objective nor subjective exclusively. Reason should stand at the helm, though the wayward breezes of feeling must puff the sails. Nature has hinted at this, by setting the eyes higher than the heart. Chaucer's poems can claim more of the former than of the latter of these excellencies. His innocent self-forgetfulness gives us the truest glimpses into his own nature, and, at the same time, makes his pictures of outward objects wonderfully clear and vivid. Though many of his poems are written in the first person, yet there

is not a shade of egoism in them. It is but the simple art of the story-teller to give more reality to what he tells.

JOHN.

Yes, it was not till our own day that the poets discovered what mystical significance had been lying dormant for ages in a capital I. It seems strange that a letter of such powerful bewitchment had not made part of the juggling wares of the Cabalists and Theurgists. Yet we find no mention of it in Rabbi Akiba or Cornelius Agrippa. Byron wrought miracles with it. I fear that the noble Stylites of modern song, who, from his lonely pillar of self, drew crowds of admiring votaries to listen to the groans of his self-inflicted misery, would have been left only to feel the cold and hunger of his shelterless pinnacle in Chaucer's simpler day.

PHILIP.

Yet, Byron always reminds me of that criminal who was shut in a dungeon, the walls of which grew every day narrower and narrower, till they crushed him at last. His selfishness walled him in from the first, so that he was never open to the sweet influences of nature, and those sweeter ones which the true heart finds in life. The sides of his jail were semi-transparent, giving him a muddy view of things immediately about him; but selfishness always builds a thick roof overhead, to cut off the heavenward gaze of the spirit. And how did it squeeze the very life out of him, in the end!

JOHN.

Byron's spirit was more halt than his body. It had been well for him had he been as ashamed, or at least as conscious, of one as of the other. He should have been banished, like Philoctetes, to some Isle of Lemnos, where his lameness should not have been offensive and contagious. As it was, the world fell in love with the defect. Some malicious Puck had dropped the juice of "Love in Idleness" upon its eyes, and limping came quite into fashion. We have never yet had a true likeness of Byron. Leigh Hunt's, I think, is more faithful than Moore's. Moore never forgot that his friend was a lord, and seemed to feel that he was paying himself a side compliment in writing a life of him. I always imagine Moore's portrait of Byron with an "I am, my dear Moore, yours, etc.," written under it, as a specimen of his autography. But to our poet. You have given me a touch of his pathos; let me hear some of the humor which you have commended so highly.

PHILIP.

Praise beforehand deadens the flavor of the wine; so that, if you are disappointed, the blame must be laid upon me. I will read you a few passages from his "Nun's Priest's Tale." It has been modernized by Dryden, under the title of "The Cock and the Fox;" but he has lost much of the raciness of the original. I have chosen this tale because it will, at the same time, give you an idea of his minute obser-

vation of nature. The story begins with a description of the poor widow who owns the hero of the story, Sir Chaunticlere. Then we have a glimpse of the hero himself. The widow has

> "A yard enclosèd all about
> With sticks, and also a dry ditch without,
> In which she had a cock hight Chaunticlere;
> In all the land for voice was not his peer;
> Not merrier notes the merry organ plays
> Within the churches, upon holydays;
> And surer was his crowing in his lodge
> Than is a clock, or abbey horologe:
> He knew by nature every step to trace
> Of the equinoctial in his native place,
> And, when fifteen degrees it had ascended,
> Then crew he so as might not be amended.
> His comb was redder than the fine coràll,
> Embattled as it were a castle-wall;
> His bill was black, and like the jet it shone;
> Like azure were his legs and toes each one;
> His nails were white as lilies in the grass,
> And like the burnèd gold his color was."

JOHN.

What gusto! If he had been painting Arthur or Charlemagne, he would not have selected his colors with more care. Without pulling out a feather from his hero's cockhood, he contrives to give him a human interest. How admirable is the little humorous thrust at the astronomers, too, in restricting Sir Chaunticlere's knowledge of the heavenly motions to his own village!

PHILIP.

Yes, Chaucer has the true poet's heart. One thing is as precious to him in point of beauty as another. He would have described his lady's cheek by the same flower to which he has here likened the toes of Chaunticlere. To go on with our story,

"This gentle cock had in his governance
Seven wifely hens to do him all pleasaunce,
Of whom the fairest-colored in the throat
Was known as the fair damsel Partelote;
Courteous she was, discreet and debonair,
Companionable, and bore herself so fair,
Sithence the hour she was a seven-night old,
That truly she the royal heart did hold
Of Chaunticlere bound fast in every limb:
He loved her so that it was well with him:
But such a joy it was to hear them sing,
When that the bright sun in the east 'gan spring,
In sweet accord!"

Chaunticlere, one morning, awakens his fair wife Partelote by a dreadful groaning; and, on her asking the cause, informs her that it must have been the effect of a bad dream he had been haunted by.

"I dreamed, that, as I roamèd up and down,
Within our yard, I there beheld a beast,
Like to a hound, that would have made arrest
Upon my body, and have had me dead.
His color 'twixt a yellow was and red,
And tippèd was his tail and both his ears
With black, unlike the remnant of his hairs.
His snout was small, and glowing were his eyes:
Still, for his look, the heart within me dies."

Partelote treats his fears with scorn. She asks indignantly,

"How durst you now for shame say to your love,
That anything could make you feel afeard?
Have you no manly heart, yet have a beard?"

She then gives him a lecture on the physiological causes of dreams, hints at a superfluity of bile, and recommends some simple remedy which her own housewifely skill can concoct from herbs that grow within the limits of his own manor. She also quotes Cato's opinion of the small faith to be put in dreams. Her lord, who does not seem superior to the common prejudice against having his wife make too liberal a display of her learning, replies by overwhelming her with an avalanche of weighty authorities, each one of which, he tells her, is worth more than ever Cato was. He concludes with a contemptuous defiance of all manner of doses, softening it toward his lady by an adroit compliment.

"But let us speak of mirth, and stint of this:
Dame Partelote, as I have hope of bliss,
Of one thing God hath sent me largest grace;
For, when I see the beauty of your face,
You are so scarlet red about your eyes,
That, when I look on you, my terror dies;
For just so sure as *in principio*
Mulier est hominis confusio,
(Madam, the meaning of this Latin is,
Woman is man's chief joy and sovereign bliss,)
Whene'er I feel at night your downy side,
I am so full of solace and of pride,

That I defy the threatenings of my dream:
And, with that word, he flew down from the beam, —
For it was day, — and eke his spouses all ;
And with a chuck he 'gan them for to call,
For he had found a corn lay in the yard:
Royal he was, and felt no more afeard ;
He looketh as a lion eyes his foes,
And roameth up and down upon his toes ;
Scarcely he deigneth set his feet to ground ;
He chucketh when a kernel he hath found,
And all his wives run to him at his call."

JOHN.

What an admirable barn-yard picture! The very chanticleer of our childhood, whose parallel Bucks county and Dorking have striven in vain to satisfy our maturer vision with! A chanticleer whose memory writes Ichabod upon the most populous and palatial fowl-houses of manhood! Chaucer's Pegasus ambles along as easily, and crops the grass and daisies of the roadside as contentedly, as if he had forgotten his wings.

PHILIP.

Yes, the work in hand is, for the time, noblest in the estimation of our poet. His eye never looks beyond it, or cheats it of its due regard by pining for something fairer and more worthy. The royalty is where he is, whether in hovel or palace. Nothing that God has not thought it beneath him to make does he deem it beneath him to study and prove worthy of all admiration. Wordsworth is like him in this.

JOHN.

True, but in Wordsworth the faculty was a conscious acquisition, while in Chaucer it was an inborn gift. Wordsworth attained to it analytically, and so became a philosopher. Chaucer is always a poet.

PHILIP.

The artificial style of writing, which tyrannized when Wordsworth first became sensible of his own powers, so disgusted him as to warp his inborn poetical faith into a fanaticism. That which should have retained the flexile sensibility of a feeling became stiffened into a theory. He has beheld nature through a loophole, whence he could see but on one side of him, though the view was broad and majestic. His eye has glorified whatever it looked upon, and the clod and the bramble have shared equally in transfiguration with the mountain and the forest. The cloud which the sun's alchemy transmutes to gold is, perhaps, not more grateful for that light than the smallest grass-blade which he shines upon, but the eye reaps a richer harvest of consolement from it. I cannot look the gift-horse in the mouth, especially when he is the true steed of the Muses, but I should have been more grateful to Wordsworth for a larger bunch of lilies and less darnel. Yet his reducing the movements of his poetical nature to a principle, if it has straitened his revenues from some sources, has not been without its rewards also. It gave surety and precision to his eye, so that it

looked at once through all outward wrappages to the very life and naked reality of things, and he has added more to our household words than any other poet since Shakspeare. Most of his work is solid, of the true Cyclopean build. There is no stucco about it, and it will bear the rudest weather of time. Of his defects

"Non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa."

Chaucer reminds me oftenest of Crabbe, in the unstudied plainness of his sentiment, and the minuteness of his descriptions. But in Crabbe's poetry Tyburn tree is seen looming up in the distance, and the bell of the parish workhouse is heard ringing. It had been better for Crabbe if he had studied Chaucer more and Pope less. The frigid artificiality of his verse often contrasts almost ludicrously with the rudeness of his theme. It is Captain Kidd in a starched cambric neckcloth and white gloves. When Chaucer describes his Shipman, we seem to smell tar.

"There also was a Shipman from far West ;
For aught I know, in Dartmouth he abode ;
Well as he could upon a hack he rode,
All in a shirt of tow-cloth to the knee ;
A dagger hanging by a lace had he,
About his neck, under his arm adown ;
The summer's heat had made his hue all brown.
He was a right good fellow certainly,
And many a cargo of good wine had he
Run from Bordeaux while the exciseman slept ;

Of a nice conscience no great care he kept,
If that he fought and had the upper hand,
By water he sent them home to every land ;
But in his craft to reckon well the tides,
The deep sea currents, and the shoals besides,
The sun's height and the moon's, and pilotage, —
There was none such from Hull unto Carthàge ;
Hardy he was and wise, I undertake ;
His beard had felt full many a tempest's shake ;
He knew well all the havens as they were
From Gothland to the Cape de Finisterre,
And every creek in Brittany and Spain ;
His trusty bark was named the Magdelaine."

JOHN.

The "savage Rosa" never dashed the lights and shades upon one of his bandits with more bold and picturesque effect. How that storm-grizzled beard stands out from the canvas! The effect is so real that it seems as if the brown old sea-king had sat for his portrait, and that every stroke of the brush had been laid on within reach of the dagger hanging at his side. Witness the amiable tints thrown in here and there, to palliate a grim wrinkle or a shaggy eyebrow. The poet takes care to tell us that

"He was a right good fellow certainly,"

lest his sitter take umbrage at the recital of his smuggling exploits in the next verse. And then with what a rough kind of humor he lets us into the secret of his murderous propensities, by hinting that he gave a passage home by water to those of whom

he got the upper hand. In spite of the would-be good-humored leer, the cut-throat look shows through. It may be very pleasant riding with him as far as Canterbury, and we might even laugh at his clumsiness in the saddle, but we feel all the while that we had rather not be overhauled by him upon the high seas. His short and easy method of sending acquaintances thus casually made to their respective homes, by water, we should not be inclined to admire so much as he himself would; especially if, as a preliminary step, he should attempt to add to the convenience of our respiratory organs with that ugly dagger of his, by opening a larger aperture somewhere nearer to the lungs. We should be inclined to distrust those extraordinary powers of natation for which he would give us credit. Even Lord Byron, I imagine, would dislike to mount that steed that "knew its rider" so well, or even to "lay his hand upon its mane," if our friend, the Shipman, held the stirrup.

PHILIP.

The whole prologue to the Canterbury Tales is equally admirable, but there is not time for me to read the whole. You must do that for yourself. I only give you a bunch or two of grapes. To enjoy the fruit in its perfection, you must go into the vineyard yourself and pluck it with the bloom on, before the flavor of the sunshine has yet faded out of it; enjoying the play of light upon the leaves also, and the apt disposition of the clusters, each lending a grace to the other.

JOHN.

Your metaphor pleases me. I like the grapes better than the wine which is pressed out of them, and they seem to me a fitting emblem of Chaucer's natural innocence. Elizabeth Barrett, a woman whose genius I admire, says very beautifully of Chaucer,

> "Old Chaucer, with his infantine,
> Familiar clasp of things divine,
> *That stain upon his lips is wine.*"

I had rather think it pure grape-juice. The first two lines take hold of my heart so that I believe them intuitively, and doubt not but my larger acquaintance with Chaucer will prove them to be true.

PHILIP.

I admire them as much as you do, and to me they seem to condense all that can be said of Chaucer. But one must know him thoroughly to feel their truth and fitness fully. At the first glimpse you get of his face, you are struck with the merry twinkle of his eye, and the suppressed smile upon his lips, which betrays itself as surely as a child in playing hide-and-seek. It is hard to believe that so happy a spirit can have ever felt the galling of that

> "Chain wherewith we are darkly bound,"

or have beaten its vain wings against the insensible gates of that awful mystery whose key can never be enticed from the hand of the warder, Death. But presently the broad, quiet forehead, the look of

patient earnestness, and the benignant reverence of the slightly bowed head, make us quite forget the lightsome impression of our first look. Yet in the next moment it comes back upon us again more strongly than ever. Humor is always a main ingredient in highly poetical natures. It is almost always the superficial indication of a rich vein of pathos, nay, of tragic feeling, below. Wordsworth seems to be an exception. Yet there is a gleam of it in his sketch of that philosopher

> "Who could peep and botanize
> Upon his mother's grave,"

and of a grim, reluctant sort in some parts of Peter Bell and the Wagoner. But he was glad to sink a shaft beneath the surface, where he could gather the more precious ore, and dwell retired from the jeers of a boorish world. In Chaucer's poetry, the humor is playing all the time round the horizon, like heat-lightning. It is unexpected and unpredictable, but as soon as you turn away from watching for it, behold, it flashes again as innocently and softly as ever. It mingles even with his pathos, sometimes. The laughing eyes of Thalia gleam through the tragic mask she holds before her face. In spite of your cold-water prejudices, I must confess that I like Miss Barrett's third line as well as the others. But while we are wandering so far from the poor old widow's yard, that fox, "full of iniquity,"

> "That new Iscariot, new Ganelon,"
> That false dissimulator, Greek Sinòn,"

as Chaucer calls him, may have made clean away with our noble friend Sir Chaunticlere.

JOHN.

Now, Esculapius defend thy bird! The Romans believed that the lion himself would strike his colors at the crowing of a cock, — a piece of natural history to which the national emblems of England and France have figuratively given the lie. But cunning is often more serviceable than bravery, and Sir Russel the fox may achieve by diplomacy the victory to which the lion was not equal.

PHILIP.

We shall see. Diplomatists are like the two Yankees who swapped jackknives together till each had cleared five dollars. Such a Sir Philip Sidney among cocks, at least, could not fall without a burst of melodious tears from every civilized barn-yard. The poet, after lamenting that Sir Chaunticlere had not heeded better the boding of his dream, warns us of the danger of woman's counsel from Eve's time downward; but takes care to add,

> "These speeches are the cock's, and none of mine;
> For I no harm of woman can divine."

He then returns to his main argument; and no one who has not had poultry for bosom-friends from childhood can appreciate the accurate grace and pastoral humor of his descriptions. The fox, meanwhile, has crept into the yard and hidden himself.

"Fair in the sand, to bathe her merrily,
Lies Partelote, and all her sisters by,
Against the sun, and Chaunticlere so free
Sang merrier than the mermaid in the sea
(For Physiologus saith certainly
How that they sing both well and merrily),
And so befell, that, as he cast his eye
Among the worts upon a butterfly,
'Ware was he of the fox that lay full low;
Nothing it lists him now to strut or crow,
But cries anon, cuk! cuk! and up doth start,
As one that is affrayèd in his heart."

The knight would have fled, as there are examples enough in Froissart to prove it would not have disgraced his spurs to do, considering the greatness of the odds against him, but the fox plies him with courteous flattery. He appeals to Sir Chaunticlere's pride of birth, pretends to have a taste in music, and is desirous of hearing him sing, hoping all the while to put his tuneful throat to quite other uses. A more bitter fate than that of Orpheus seems to be in store for our feathered son of Apollo, since his spirit, instead of hastening to join that of his Eurydice, must rake for corn in Elysian fields, with the bitter thought that not one but seven Eurydices are cackling for him "*superis in auris*." The fox

"Says, 'Gentle Sir, alas! what will you do?
Are you afraid of him that is your friend?
Now certes, I were worse than any fiend,
If I to you wished harm or villany;
I am not come your counsel to espy,

But truly all that me did hither bring
Was only for to hearken how you sing,
For, on my word, your voice is merrier even
Than any angel hath that is in heaven,
And you beside a truer feeling show, Sir,
Than did Boece, or any great composer ;
My Lord, your father (God his spirit bless!
And eke your mother, for her gentleness)
Have honored my poor house to my great ease,
And, certes, Sir, full fain would I you please.
But, since men talk of singing I will say
(Else may I lose my eyes this very day),
Save you, I never heard a mortal sing
As did your father at the day-breaking;
Certes, it was with all his heart he sung,
And, for to make his voice more full and strong,
He would so pain him, that with either eye,
He needs must wink, so loud he strove to cry,
And stand upon his tiptoes therewithal,
And stretch his comely neck forth long and small.
Discretion, too, in him went hand in hand
With music, and no man in any land
In wisdom or in song did him surpass.' "

JOHN.

I thought Chaucer's portrait of the son perfect, till Sir Russel hung up his of the father beside it. Why, Vandyke himself would look chalky beside such flesh and blood as this. Such a cock, one would think, might have served a score of Israelites for a sacrifice at their feast of atonement, or have been a sufficient thank-offering to the gods for twenty Spartan victories. Stripped of his feathers, Plato would have

taken him for something more than human. It must have been such a one as this that the Stoics esteemed it as bad as parricide to slay.[1]

PHILIP.

The fox continues,

"'Let 's see, can you your father counterfeit?'
This Chaunticlere his wings began to beat,
As one that could not his foul treason spy,
So was he ravished by his flattery.
. . . . .
Sir Chaunticlere stood high upon his toes,
Stretched forth his neck and held his eyes shut close,
And 'gan to crow full loudly for the nonce,
When Dan Russel, the fox, sprang up at once,
And by the gorget seized Sir Chaunticlere,
And on his back toward the wood him bare."

Forthwith the seven wives begin a sorrowful ululation; Dame Partelote, in her capacity as favorite, shrieking more sovereignly than the rest. Another Andromache, she sees her Hector dragged barbarously from the walls of his native Ilium, whose defence and prop he had ever been. Then follows a picture which surpasses even Hogarth.

"The luckless widow and her daughters two,
Hearing the hens cry out and make their woe,
Out at the door together rushed anon,
And saw how toward the wood the fox is gone,
Bearing upon his back the cock away;
They cried, 'Out, out, alas! and welaway!

[1] Cicero, Orat. pro L. Murænâ, § XXIX.

Aha, the fox!' and after him they ran,
And, snatching up their staves, ran many a man;
Ran Col the dog, ran Talbot and Gerlànd,
And Malkin, with her distaff in her hand;
Ran cow and calf, and even the very hogs,
So frightened with the barking of the dogs,
And shouting of the men and women eke,
Ran till they thought their very hearts would break,
And yelled as never fiends in hell have done;
The ducks screamed, thinking that their sand was run;
The geese, for fear, flew cackling o'er the trees;
Out of their hive buzzed forth a swarm of bees;
So hideous was the noise, ah, *benedicite!*
Certes, not Jack Straw and his varleboy
Raised ever any outcry half so shrill,
When they some fleming were about to kill,
As that same day was made about the fox:
Vessels of brass they brought forth and of box,
And horns and bones, on which they banged and blew;
It seemed the very sky would split in two.

. . . . .

The cock who lay upon the fox's back,
In all his dread unto his captor spake,
And said; 'Most noble Sir, if I were you,
I would (as surely as God's help I sue)
Cry, Turn again, ye haughty villains all!
A very pestilence upon you fall!
Now I am come unto the forest's side,
Maugre your heads, the cock shall here abide;
I will him eat, i' faith, and that anon.'
Answered the fox, 'Good sooth, it shall be done!'
And, as he spake the word, all suddenly,
The cock broke from his jaws deliverly,
And high upon a tree he flew anon.

And when the fox saw that the cock was gone,
'Alas! O Chaunticlere, alas!' quoth he,
'I have, 't is true, done you some injury,
In that I made you for a while afeard,
By seizing you from forth your native yard;
But, Sir, I did it with no ill intent;
Come down, and I will tell you what I meant,
God help me as I speak the truth to you!'
'Nay,' quoth the other, 'then, beshrew us two,
But first beshrew myself both blood and bones,
If thou beguile me oftener than once;
Never again shalt thou by flattery
Make me to sing and wink the while mine eye;
For he that winketh, when he most should see,
Deserves no help from Providence, pardie.'"

JOHN.

So our friend Sir Chaunticlere escapes, after all. The humorous moral of the story is heightened by the cunning Reynard's being foiled with his own weapons. The bare fact of enduing animals with speech and other human properties is, in itself, highly ludicrous. Fables always inculcate magnanimity. To see our weaknesses thus palpably bodied forth in their appropriate animal costume brings them down from the false elevation to which their association with ourselves had raised them. The next time we meet them in life, their human diguise drops off, and the ape or the owl takes our own place or that of our friend. That treatise of Baptista Porta's, in which he traces the likeness between men's faces and those of animals, is painful and

shocking; but when we casually note a human expression in the countenance of a brute, it is merely laughable. In the former instance the mind is carried downward, and in the latter upward. To children there is nothing humorous in Æsop. They read his fables as soberly as they afterwards read Scott's novels. The moral is always skipped, as tedious. The honey-bag is all they seek; the sting is of no use, save to the bee. Yet afterwards we find that Lucian and Rabelais are dull beside Æsop; and the greater the seeming incongruity, the greater the mirth.

PHILIP.

Chaucer was aware of this when he put so much pedantry into the mouth of Chaunticlere; and the fox's allusion to Boethius makes me laugh in spite of myself. Chaunticlere's compliment to Dame Partelote, too, where he expresses the intense satisfaction which he feels in observing that

"She is so scarlet red about her eyes,"

is the keenest of satires upon those lovers who have sung the bodily perfections of their mistresses, and who have set their affections, as it were, upon this year's leaves, to fall off with them at the bidding of the first November blast of fortune. It was a Platonic notion, to which Spenser gave in his allegiance, that a fair spirit always chose a fair dwelling, and beautified it the more by its abiding. It is the sweetest apology ever invented for a physical passion. But I do not like this filching of arrows from heavenly love,

to furnish forth the quiver of earthly love withal. Love is the most hospitable of spirits, and adorns the interior of his home for the nobler welcome, not the exterior for the more lordly show. It is not the outside of his dwelling that invites, but the soft domestic murmur stealing out at the door, and the warm, homely light gushing from the windows. No matter into what hovel of clay he enters, that is straightway the palace, and beauty holds her court in vain. I doubt if Chaucer were conscious of his sarcasm, but I can conceive of no more cutting parody than a sonnet of Chaunticlere's upon his mistress's comb or beak, or other gallinaceous excellency. Imagine him enthusiastic over her sagacity in the hunting of earthworms, and her grace in scratching for them with those toes

"White as lilies in the grass,"

standing upon one leg as he composed a quatrain upon her tail-feathers, and finally losing himself in the melodious ecstasy of her cackle!

There is certainly, as you have said, something ludicrous in the bare idea of animals endued with human propensities and feelings, and the farther away we get from any physical resemblance, the more keenly moved is our sense of humor. That king-making jelly of the bees strips Nicholas and Victoria of their crowns and ermine, and makes them merely forked radishes, like the rest of us. And when I learned that there was domestic slavery among certain species of the ants, I could not but

laugh, as I imagined some hexapodal McDuffie mounted upon a cherry-stone, and convincing a caucus of chivalrous listeners of their immense superiority to some neighboring hill, whose inhabitants got in their own harvest of bread-crumbs and dead beetles, unaided by that patriarchal machinery.

JOHN.

The passage you first read me from the death scene of Arcite moved me so much that I cannot help wishing you would read me something more in the same kind.

PHILIP.

I were no true lover if I were to express any fear of your being disappointed. Yet I know not if you and I shall be equally pleased. The very gnarliest and hardest of hearts has some musical strings in it. But they are tuned differently in every one of us, so that the selfsame strain, which wakens a thrill of sympathetic melody in one, may leave another quite silent and untouched. For whatever I love, my delight mounts to an extravagance. There are verses which I cannot read without tears of exultation which to others are merely indifferent. Those simple touches, scattered here and there by all great writers, which make me feel that I, and every most despised and outcast child of God that breathes, have a common humanity with those glorious spirits, overpower me. Poetry has a key which unlocks some more inward cabinet of my nature than is accessible to any other power. I cannot explain it, or account

for it, or say what faculty it appeals to. The chord which vibrates strongly becomes blurred and invisible in proportion to the intensity of its impulse. Often the mere rhyme, the cadence and sound of the words, awaken this strange feeling in me. Not only do all the happy associations of my earthly life, that before lay scattered, take beautiful shapes, like iron dust at the approach of the magnet; but something dim and vague, beyond these, moves itself in me, with the uncertain sound of a far-off sea. My sympathy with remotest eld becomes that of a bystander and an actor. Those noble lines of Shakspeare, in one of his sonnets, drop their veil of mysticism, and become modern and ordinary:

> "No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change:
> Thy pyramids, built up with newer might,
> To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;
> They are but dressings of a former sight."

The grand symphony of Wordsworth's Ode rolls through me, and I tremble, as the air does with the gathering thunders of the organ. My clay seems to have a sympathy with the mother earth whence it was taken, to have a memory of all that our orb has ever witnessed of great and noble, of sorrowful and glad. With the wise Samian, I can touch the mouldering buckler of Euphorbus and claim an interest in it deeper than that of its antiquity. I have been the bosom friend of Leander and of Romeo. I seem to go behind Musæus and Shakspeare, and to get my intelligence at first hand. Sometimes, in my

sorrow, a line from Spenser steals in upon my memory as if by some vitality and external volition of its own, like a blast from the distant trump of a knight pricking toward the court of Faërie, and I am straightway lifted out of that sadness and shadow into the sunshine of a previous and long-agone experience. Often, too, this seemingly lawless species of association overcomes me with a sense of sadness. Seeing a waterfall or a forest for the first time, I have a feeling of something gone, a vague regret, that, in some former state, I have drank up the wine of their beauty, and left to the defrauded present only the muddy lees. Yet again, what divine over-compensation, when the same memory (shall I call it ?), or phantasy, lets fall a drop of its invisible elixir into my cup, and I behold to-day, which before showed but forlorn and beggared, clothed in the royal purple, and with the golden sceptre of a line of majestical ancestry !

JOHN.

If I do not understand all that you say, I can at least prove my superiority to vulgar prejudice by believing in your sincerity. A base mind always takes that for cant in another which would be such in itself, and is apt to blame any innocent assertion of peculiarity for assumption. Yet, in fact, what is peculiar to any one is not only all that is of worth in him, but is also the most likely to be showing itself on all occasions. Poetry does not convey the same impressions to my mind as to yours, but other things have sometimes given me a feeling akin to what you describe.

PHILIP.

When you speak thus of poetry, you restrict it to what has been written by the poets, which is but a small part of it yet. In attributing a certain mystical influence to peculiar associations, I said more than I meant to have done. But it is better to say more than less and if I err may it always be rather upon the side of confidence than of suspicion. I intended to imply that our tastes are so arbitrary as entirely to forbid the establishment of a code of criticism. I doubt if any better reasoning can be given for our likings than the Latin poet gave for his dislikes. We can assert them, but when we strive to explain and apologize for them, we are quite likely to lose ourselves in a mire of cant and conventionality. It may be said that it is truth in every case that delights us; but the next question is Pilate's, "What *is* truth?" It is a different thing (let me rather say it assumes a different aspect) to each of us, and thus is equally amiable to all. How shall we explain it? Here is a man who is a scholar and an artist, who knows precisely how every effect has been produced by every great writer that ever lived, and who is resolved to reproduce them. But the heart passes by his pitfalls and traps and carefully planned springes, to be taken captive by some simple fellow, who expected the event as little as did his prisoner. The critics fix upon one writer as a standard, and content themselves for a century or two with measuring everybody else by him. They justly enough consider that

criticism should be conservative; but their idea of conservatism is that of a Fakir, who deems it religion to stand upon one leg till all its muscles become palsied and useless. In the course of time, their system, if it ever had vitality, becomes effete. If they commend Hercules, it is for his skill at Omphale's distaff, till the delightful impropriety of their criticism gets them laughed off the stage. The truth is that the only safe method is to point out what parts of a poem please the critic, and to let the rest go. Posterity will reverse our judgments ninety-nine times in the hundred, and it is certainly better to be censured for kindness than for severity. If the poets have not been dull, they have at least been the causes of a lavish prodigality of dulness in other men. Taste is the next gift to genius. They are the Eros and Anteros of Art. Without his brother, the first must remain but a child still. Poets are vulgarly considered deficient in the reasoning faculty; whereas none was ever a great poet, without having it in excess, and after a century or two men become convinced of it. They jump the middle terms of their syllogisms, it is true, and assume premises to which the world has not yet arrived; but time stamps their deductions as invincible. Taste is that faculty which at once perceives, and hails as true, ideas which yet it has not the gift of discovering itself. It is not something to be educated and fostered, but is as truly innate as the creative faculty itself. A man with what is blunderingly called an educated taste is incapable of aught but the classic; that is, he recognizes

in a new work that which makes the charm of an old one, and pronounces it worthy of admiration accordingly. Put the right foot of the Apollo forward instead of the left, and call it Philip of Pokanoket, and he is in ecstasies over a work at once so truly national and classic. He would have stood dumb, and with an untouched heart, before the Apollo fresh from the chisel of the sculptor.

JOHN.

Very likely. This faculty of taste, which I agree with you in thinking innate, is the first great requisite of a critic. Learning, ingenuity, and boldness are merely its handmaidens. Our critics have been interesting in one regard; they have experimentally demonstrated how long a man will live after the brains are out. This aspect, however, is for the physiologists. No critic that ever lived would have the hardihood to foretell the precise hues of to-morrow's sunset, and then to complain if it gave him an acre of purple and gold more or less. Yet the same man would confidently reduce Art to a chessboard, upon which all the combinations are mathematically calculable and exhaustible, and compel genius, whose very essence is freedom, to confine itself to these little arbitrary squares of black and white.

PHILIP.

And yet the next development of Genius is as unpredictable as the glory of the next sunset. The critics tell us the day for epics has gone by. Wait till the master comes, and see. Everything is im-

possible till it is done; and when *the man* has come and accomplished his work, the world says, Am I thousands of years old, to be gravelled in my horn-book? The world has been to blame in this matter. It has allowed those to be critics who were unfit for anything else. Criticism has been the manor and glebe of those who had no other inheritance, as the church used to be to the younger sons of the aristocracy in England. And the lion's hide of anonymousness, through which only the judicious catch sight of the betraying ears, has often indued Zoïlus with a terror not his own.

JOHN.

After all, they have only interfered with the larder of Genius. They keep it upon a spare diet, that it may sup the more heartily with the Muses. Hunger has wrenched many a noble deed from men; but there is a corrupting leaven of self in all that Ambition can caress out of them, which soon turns it quite stale and musty. *Impletus venter non vult studere libenter* was the old monkish jingle, and let us be grateful in due measure to the critics who have made the poets unwillingly illustrate it.

PHILIP.

Surely, you jest. A greasy savor of the kitchen intrudes itself into whatever is done for the belly's sake. No. What a man pays for bread and butter is worth its market value, and no more. What he pays for Love's sake is gold indeed, which has a lure for angels' eyes, and rings well upon God's touch-

stone. And it is love that has inspired all true hearts. This is the ample heritage of the poets, and it is of this they have made us heirs. When the true poet is born, a spirit becomes incarnate which can embrace the whole rude earth as with the soft arms of a glorifying atmosphere. The inarticulate moan of the down-trodden he shall clothe in language, and so wing it with divine music that the dullest heart shall look up to see it knocking at heaven's gates. The world's joy, erewhile a leaden cloud, shall turn golden under his sunlike look. And when such a spirit comes forth from its heavenly palace, where it had been wrapped softly in the imperial purple of noble purposes and happy dreams, and tended by all the majestical spirits of the past, — when it comes forth in obedience to the beckonings of these its benignant guardians, saying, "Behold, my brethren are ahungered and I will feed them; they are athirst and I will give them drink; my plenty is for them, else is it beggary and starving," and is jeered at and flouted because it can speak only the tongue of the heaven whence it came, now foreign and obsolete, what bewildering bitterness, what trembling even to the deep Godward bases of faith, what trustfulness mocked into despair, become its portion! The love, the hope, the faith, which it had sent out before it to bring it tidings of the fair land of promise, come back pale and weary, and cry for food in vain to the famishing heart which once so royally entertained them. The beautiful humanity, a vision of which had braced the sinews of its nature, and had made all

things the vassals of its monarch eye, seems to it now but as a sphinx, from whose unchangeable and stony orbs it can win no look of recognition, and whose granite lips move not at its despairing cry. You smile, but let me think it is for sympathy. A sneer is the weapon of the weak. Like other devil's weapons, it is always cunningly ready to our hand, and there is more poison in the handle than in the point. But how many noble hearts have writhed with its venomous stab, and festered with its subtle malignity!

JOHN.

Yet, from some of its hurts a celestial ichor flows, as from a wounded god. I would hardly change the sorrowful words of the poets for their glad ones. Tears dampen the strings of the lyre, but they grow the tenser for it, and ring even the clearer and more ravishingly. We may be but the chance acquaintance of him who has made us the sharer of his joy, but he who has admitted us to the sanctuary of his grief has made us partakers also of the dignity of friendship. Sorrow, you will allow, if not scorn or neglect, is a good schoolmaster for poets. Why, it has wrenched one couplet of true poetry out of Dr. Johnson.

PHILIP.

You mean that one in his "Vanity of Human Wishes,"

> "There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,
> Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail."

You might have instanced, too, his letter to Lord Chesterfield, though it be not in verse. But ill-fortune, if it bring out the poetry of a prosaic nature, will but deaden a highly poetical one.

JOHN.

You agreed with me in my praise of Elizabeth Barrett's lines; can you give me an illustration of Chaucer's

"Infantine,
Familiar clasp of things divine"?

PHILIP.

It would be difficult. An author's piety cannot be proved from the regular occurrence of certain decorums and respectabilities of religion in his works, but from a feeling which permeates the whole. I have read books in which the name [illegible]God was never once so much as alluded to; w[illegible]irresistibly persuaded me of the writer's fait[illegible]d childlike love of him. And I have [illegible] where that blessed name, with a parenti[illegible] systematic piety, made part of every sent[illegible] only impressed me like the constantly r[illegible] figures upon calico. There is no intentiona[illegible] about Chaucer, no French collar-and-wristband [illegible] rality, too common in our day. Now, certain day of the week, and certain men, seem to claim a monopoly in religion. It is something quite too costly and precious to make part of every day's furniture. We must not carry it into the street or the market, lest it get soiled. We doff it and hang it up as

easily as a Sunday suit. The ancients esteemed it sacrilege to touch what was set apart for the gods. Many of our own time imitate that ethnic scrupulousness, and carefully forbear religion, yet are deemed pious men, too. In Chaucer you will find a natural piety everywhere shining through, mildly and equably, like a lamp set in an alabaster vase. The wise man maintains a hospitable mind. He scruples not to entertain thoughts, no matter how strange and foreign they may be, and to ask news of them of realms which he has never explored. He has no fear of their stirring any treason under his own roof. Chaucer apparently acted upon this principle. He loved speculation, and when he was running down some theological dogma, he does not mind leaping the church inclosure, and pursuing his prey till it takes refuge under the cassock of the priest himself. But though he seems not to set much store by forms and outward observances, he is quite too near the reverence and belief and earnestness not to be religious. The earliest poetry of all countries is religious poetry, or that in which the idea of God predominates and is developed. The first effort at speech which man's nature makes in all tongues is to pronounce the word "Father." Reverence is the foundation of all poetry. From reverence the spirit climbs on to love, and thence beholds all things. No matter in what Scythian fashion these first recognitions of something above and beyond the soul are uttered, they contain the germs of psalms and prophecies. Whether for a while the immortal guest

rests satisfied with a Fetish or an Apollo, it has already grasped the clew which leads unerringly to the very highest idea. For reverence is the most keen-eyed and exacting of all the faculties, and if there be the least flaw in its idol, it will kneel no longer. From wood it rises to gold and ivory; from these to the yet simpler and more majestic marble; and, planting its foot upon that, it leaps upward to the infinite and invisible. When I assume reverence, then, as the very primal essence and life of poetry, I claim for it a nobler stirp than it has been the fashion to allow it. Beyond Adam runs back its illustrious genealogy. It stood with Uriel in the sun, and looked down over the battlements of heaven with the angelic guards. In short, it is no other than the religious sentiment itself. That is poetry which makes sorrow lovely and joy solemn to us, and reveals to us the holiness of things. Faith casts herself upon her neck as upon a sister's. She shows us what glimpses we get of life's spiritual face. What she looks on becomes miraculous, though it be but the dust of the wayside; and miracles become but as dust for their simpleness. There is nothing noble without her; with her there can be nothing mean. What songs the Druids sang within the sacred circuit of Stonehenge we can barely conjecture; but those forlorn stones doubtless echoed with appeals to a higher something; and are not even now without their sanctity, since they chronicle a nation's desire after God. Whether those forest-priests worshipped the strangely beautiful element of fire, or if the pil-

grim Belief pitched her tent and rested for a night in some ruder and bleaker creed, there we may yet trace the light footprints of Poesy, as she led her sister onward to fairer fields, and streams flowing nearer to the oracle of God.

JOHN.

With you, then, the reading of any poet must begin, like the Romish missal, with a *sursum corda*. It is no wonder that you are so sore against the critics, for they usually reverse the rule. The poets, however, have given them some reason for it. They have seldom been such religious teachers as I should wish to be guided by. Byron seems to have written by a redder light than usually comes from above; and Milton and Burns show a very anomalous sympathy for that unfortunate personage whom Latimer calls the only bishop faithful in his diocese.

PHILIP.

Byron might have made a great poet. As it is, his poetry is the record of a struggle between his good and his baser nature, in which the latter wins. The fall is great in proportion to the height from which one is hurled. An originally beautiful spirit becomes the most degraded when perverted. It would fain revenge itself upon that purity from which it is an unhappy and restless exile, and drowns its remorse in the drunkenness and vain bluster of defiance. There is a law of neutralization of forces, which hinders bodies from sinking beyond a certain depth in the sea; but in the ocean of baseness the

deeper we get the easier is the sinking. As for the kindness which Milton and Burns felt for the Devil, I am sure God thinks of him with pity a thousand times to their once, and the good Origen believed him not incapable of salvation.

JOHN.

We have forgotten Chaucer.

PHILIP.

We shall come to him presently. The straight line is not the line of beauty. There is an oak-wood a mile or two hence, whither I often walk, but I never make for it the straightforward pertinacity of a turnpike. A clump of golden-rods, or a sprig of succory, is enough to draw me aside; and when I reach my oaks, I bring to them a heart more open and a keener sympathy. Once there, I am not locked up in them, but seek out glimpses of landscape on every side, the enjoyment of which I seem to owe to their hospitality. The rustle of their leaves makes my ear sympathize in the happiness of my eye, and when I turn wholly back to them again, their shade seems thicker, their vistas more warmly sprinkled with sunshine, and their trunks more royally mantled with moss. Let Chaucer be our oak-wood to-day. There is nothing that does not harmonize with and illustrate what we have most at heart, and one key will open all the doors of nature. No man, if he try, can enjoy one thing at a time; nor can he love one thing truly, and be indifferent to any other the most remote.

JOHN.

It is a bad sign when a man is skilful in apologies. But I shall accept your excuse, since we are met to converse, and not to argue. So now to Chaucer again.

PHILIP.

I am ready. But this attempting to illustrate a great poet by specimens is like giving an idea of Niagara by a bottleful of water brought thence, or of Wachuset by a fragment of its granite. I shall read you now an extract from the "Clerk's Tale." It is the story of "patient Grizzel," and interests me the more from his telling us that he

> "Learned it at Padua of a worthy clerk,
> So proven by his word and by his work;
> He is dead now, and nailèd in his chest,
> I pray to God to give his soul good rest;
> Francis Petrarch, the poet laureate,
> This scholar hight."

JOHN.

But was Chaucer ever in Italy?

PHILIP.

It is highly probable, though not certain. It is not likely that Chaucer would have quoted Petrarch as his authority rather than Boccace, unless the fact be as he states it. I see no reason to doubt it. Beside, incredulity robs us of many pleasures, and gives us nothing in return. It is well to distrust what we hear to make us think worse of a man, and

to accept a story's pleasantness as *primâ facie* evidence of its truth.

JOHN.

It is certainly agreeable to imagine Petrarch and Chaucer together; and who knows but Boccace filled up the number of the classic feast? I wonder there is no tradition concerning our poet's journey to Italy, as there is about Milton's. The graves of poets seem to be the natural soil out of which such sweet legendary flowers grow.

PHILIP.

The Italians would have had one. They are either very unscrupulous, or deficient in originality of invention in such matters; for precisely the same story is told of Tasso and Pulci, and, I think, of Ariosto.

JOHN.

You mean that of the bandit's dismissing them courteously, on learning their names. A very Claude Duval of ruffians! One finds it hard to believe in three such. Yet it may be true. It could never have happened in England or America, where the mass of the people know less and care less about their poets than in any other countries. Yet our native tongue boasts the greatest and most universal of poets. The Sicilians paid a greater compliment to Euripides, and Milton has immortalized Alexander's homage to the memory of Pindar.

PHILIP.

The story of Griselda, of course, you know already; so that I shall need but a short preface to what I

read. The first trial which the husband makes of his wife's patience is by taking away her infant daughter (her only child), with the avowed purpose of having it murdered. A "Sergeant" is sent to take the babe. At first Griselda is silent;

"But at the last to speak she thus began,
And meekly she unto the Sergeant prayed,
(So as he was a worthy gentleman,)
That she might kiss her child before it died:
And in her lap the little child she laid,
With full sad face, and 'gan the child to bliss,
And lullèd it, and after 'gan it kiss."

JOHN.

Very sweet and touching. I like, too, what our modern critics would, in all probability, find fault with, the frequent repetition of the word "child." The poet had put himself so in the mother's place that any less tender epithet would not satisfy him. Now-a-days an author will wade round through a quagmire of verbiage to avoid using the same word over again. The old poets were more straightforward.

PHILIP.

I am sorry that we have lost the use of the word "bliss" as a verb, so much motherliness is conveyed by it.

"And thus she said, in her benignant voice:
'Farewell, my child! I shall thee never see;
But, since that I have marked thee with the cross,
Of that same father blessèd may'st thou be,

Who died for us upon a cross of tree :
Thy spirit, little child, his care I make,
For thou this night must perish for my sake.'

"I trow that for a nurse, in such a case,
It had been hard this pity for to see ;
Well might a mother, then, have cried, alas!
But ne'ertheless so steadfast-souled was she,
That she endurèd all adversity,
And meekly to the Sergeant there she said,
'Take back again your little youngling maid.'

"'Go now,' said she, 'and do my lord's behest ;
But one thing would I pray you of your grace,
Unless my lord forbid you, at the least,
Bury this little body in some place,
Where neither birds nor beasts may it displace' :
But to that purpose he no word would say,
But took the child and went upon his way."

You are silent.

JOHN.

I was listening to hear the mother's tears fall upon the face of her child. The first voice that is heard, after the reading of good poetry, comes ordinarily from the shallowest heart in the company. Praise follows truth afar off, and only overtakes her at the grave ; plausibility clings to her skirts and holds her back, till then. I never knew a woman who thought well of Griselda, and I confess I would not choose that woman for a wife who did. Her duty as a mother was paramount to her duty as a wife. As is not uncommon, she betrayed a general principle for the sake of a particular one, which had fastened upon

her imagination. Patience, when it is a divine thing, is active, not passive. Chaucer has so tenderly contrived to enlist our pity as to save her from contempt. With what motherly endearment she repeats the word "*little*," as if to move the sympathy of the stone-hearted Sergeant!

PHILIP.

What you say reminds me of a passage in the "Yorkshire Tragedy," one of the plays attributed to Shakspeare. I have seen it somewhere quoted as a proof that it was his. The touch of nature in it is worthy of him, but there is nothing in the rest of the drama to sustain the hypothesis. A spendthrift father, in a fit of madness, murders his children. As he seizes one of them, the little fellow, to appease him, calls himself by the name his father had doubtless given him in happier days. "O, what will you do, father? *I am your white boy*."

JOHN.

That is very touching. How is it that this simpleness, the very essence of tragic pathos, has become unattainable of late? I know only one modern dramatist capable of it, though nothing would seem easier; I mean Robert Browning. Wordsworth has as deep glances now and then in his poems, but his tragedy of "The Borderers" is as level as a prairie. There is scarce anything tragic about it, except the reading of it; yet what insight has he shown in some parts of "The Excursion"! Among a thousand such passages in Shakspeare there is one which

always struck me as peculiarly fine. It is in the first scene of the second act of "King John." Queen Elinor says to Arthur,

> "Come to thy grandam, child."

Constance replies with sarcastic bitterness, and yet, I fancy, with hot tears in her eyes, the while, —

> "Do, child, go to it' grandam, child ;
> Give grandam kingdom, and it' grandam will
> Give it a plum, a cherry, and a fig.
> There 's a good grandam."

Who but Shakspeare would have dared this baby-talk in such a place ? Yet how admirable !

PHILIP.

The simplest thoughts, feelings, and experiences that lie upon the very surface of life are overlooked by all but uncommon eyes. Most look upon them as mere weeds. Yet a weed, to him that loves it, is a flower ; and there are times when we would not part with a sprig of chickweed for a whole continent of lilies. No man thinks his own nature miraculous, while to his neighbor it may give a surfeit of wonder. Let him go where he will, he can find no heart so worth a study as his own. The prime fault of modern poets is that they are resolved to be peculiar. They are not content that it should come of itself, but they must dig and bore for it, sinking their wells usually through the grave of some buried originality, so that if any water rises it is tainted. Read most

volumes of poems, and you are reminded of a French bill of fare, where everything is *à la* something else. Even a potato *au naturel* is a godsend. When will poets learn that a grass-blade of their own raising is worth a barrow-load of flowers from their neighbor's garden?

JOHN.

Men ordinarily wear as many sets of borrowed opinions as the grave-digger in Hamlet wears waistcoats. They look quite burly till you strip them; and then, too often, you find but a withered anatomy beneath. But, after all, borrowed garments never keep one warm. A curse goes with them, as with Harry Gill's blankets. Nor can one get smuggled goods safely into kingdom-come. How lank and pitiful does one of these gentry look after posterity's customs officers have had the plucking of him!

PHILIP.

It certainly is odd that it should be so hard to get a man's natural thought from him. No gift seems to be more rare than that of conveying simply and distinctly the peculiar impression which any object makes upon the mind of the recipient. Give a man anything to describe, and he forthwith puzzles himself to talk about it as some other admired person would do; so that we get a thousand worthless books for one good one. And yet the sincere thought which the meanest pebble gives to a human soul is of great price to us. A familiar instance may be taken from Ossian. Macpherson, who has given us

some highly original images, spoils half his work by forgetting that his bard was a Gael and not a Greek, and by endeavoring to make Ossian speak like Homer.

JOHN.

Like Pope's Homer you mean. This constant reproduction of old thoughts in a new dress recalls to my mind a tragic reminiscence of my childhood. At a museum, upon which I was in the habit of monthly exhausting my childish income with the spendthrift ambition of being one day large enough to be charged full price for admission, there was a wax representation of Othello and Desdemona. Who these mythological personages were I knew not; but Othello seemed to me the model of a fairy prince, and I sought always vainly, in the real world without, for anything like Desdemona. The "Boston Beauty" and "Miss McRea" in the glass case of the next room could never detain my feet or wile my heart from its fealty to her. Listen to the catastrophe. Just after a famous murder had been perpetrated, my funds had accumulated sufficiently to enable me to visit the shrine of my romance. The proprietor of that museum may have a sweet conscience, but I am persuaded that he put a ninepence in his pocket that day which made his pillow uneasy. My Desdemona, to glut a depraved public appetite, had been metamorphosed into a Mr. Jenkins, and my Othello into his murderer! That divine wax,

"That boon prefigured in my earliest wish,"

which I had worshipped as never Pygmalion did his image, or the young Roman his statue of Venus, had been violated. Into that room I never ventured again. I could have broken the nose off the "Boston Beauty" for her look of attempted unconcern, through which the ill-concealed triumph sparkled. With that feeling of revenge upon itself with which the heart consoles itself for any loss by rushing to the other extreme, I thenceforward centred all my adoration upon "the great sea-vampire," an entirely original triangular conception by an ingenious artist in leather, which my mind, early disciplined to the miraculous by Goldsmith's "Animated Nature," readily accepted as authentic.

PHILIP.

This tragic recollection has, I hope, put your mind in tune for hearing more of Griselda's sorrows. But you must read the rest of her story for yourself. I have many other delicates for you to taste before we part. Let me read you an exquisite stanza from "Troilus and Creseide." It tells you how Creseide first avowed her love. There is nothing more tender in Coleridge's "Genevieve."

"And, as the early, bashful nightingale
Doth hush at first when she begins to sing,
If chance she heareth any shepherd's tale,
Or in the hedges any rusteling,
And then more boldly doth her voice outring;
Cressid right so, when her first dread was spent,
Opened her heart and gave her love full vent."

I know not where the nightingale is more sweetly touched upon. Shakspeare has alluded to it once or twice, but not with enthusiasm. Coleridge, in one of his early poems, has given us a high strain of music about it. Milton's sonnet is not so fine as most of his, though the opening is exquisite.

JOHN.

Keats has written, perhaps, the best ode in the language upon this bird. Wherever the learned fix the site of Eden, it will never be in America, where we have neither the nightingale or the sky-lark. Yet we have the bobolink and the mocking-bird, in rich compensation. Nor are we wholly without music at night. I have often heard the song-sparrow and the robin at midnight; and what solitude would be quite lonely, wanting the mournful plaint of the whippoorwill? The newspapers now and then have lent their diurnal immortality to foolish punning verses upon this last bird; but the persons who wrote them could never have heard its voice, or they would have wasted their time in some less idle manner. How much dignity does the love of nature give to minds otherwise trivial? White's Selborne has become a classic. If he had chronicled the migrations of kings and queens and dukes and duchesses, he would have deserved only the trunk-maker's gratitude. But his court-journal of black-birds and gold-finches has won him an inner nook in our memories.

PHILIP.

I intend to read you presently another passage from "Troilus and Creseide," which has been excellently modernized by Wordsworth. But first I will show you that Chaucer's love of nature was a passion with him. Listen to his praise of the daisy. It is in the prologue to his "Legend of Good Women," and perhaps I am partial to it from its being a favorite with a very dear friend. If the passage have no other merit, it has at least that of being beloved by one whose love is like a crown to whatever it blesses.

"When the month of May
Is come, and I can hear the small birds sing,
And the fresh flowers have begun to spring,
Good bye, my book! devotion, too, good bye!
Now this peculiar frame of mind have I,
That, among all the flowers of the mead,
I love the most that flower white and red,
Which men in our town the daisy name;
And such affection draws me unto them,
As I have said before, when come is May,
That in my bed there dawneth not a day
But I am up and walking in the mead
To see this flower against the sunshine spread,
When it upriseth early by the morrow:
That blissful sight doth soften all my sorrow;
So glad am I, when I have sight of it,
To pay it fealty and reverence fit,
As one that is of other flowers the flower,
Having all good and honor for her dower,
And ever fair alike, and fresh of hue;

And ever I love it with a passion new,
And ever shall until my heart shall die:
I swear it not, and yet I will not lie."

How like a lover he heaps praise upon praise, and protestation on protestation, as if he were fearful the blossom might wither ere he had done it honor enough! Ah, if we would but pledge ourselves to truth as heartily as we do to a real or imaginary mistress, and think life too short only because it abridged our time of service, what a new world we should have! Most men pay their vows to her in youth, and go up into the bustle of life, with her kiss warm upon their lips, and her blessing lying upon their hearts like dew; but the world has lips less chary, and cheaper benedictions, and if the broken troth-plight with their humble village-mistress comes over them sometimes with a pang, she knows how to blandish away remorse, and persuades them, ere old age, that their young enthusiasm was a folly and an indiscretion.

JOHN.

The pillow of their death-bed, however, hears the name of the old love again, and is made the confidant of some bitter tears to her memory. But you have given me your daisy snipped short off by the head, as a child does.

PHILIP.

"Never man loved more hotly in his life,
And, when the evening cometh, I run blithe,
As soon as e'er the sun begins to west,
To see this flower, how it will go to rest,

For fear of night, darkness so hateth she ;
Her cheer is in the brightness utterly
Of the glad sun, for there she will unclose.
Ah, that I have not English rhyme or prose
Enough to give this flower its praise aright !
. . . . . .
My busy spirit, that still thirsts anew
To see this flower so young and fresh of hue,
Constrainèd me with such a great desire,
That in my heart I yet can feel its fire,
And made me rise before the peep of day,
It being now the morning first of May,
With glad devotion and heart full of dread,
To see the resurrection from the dead
Of this same flower, when it should unclose
Against the sun that rose as red as the rose
Which in the breast was of the beast that day
He led Agenor's daughter fair away ;
And down upon my knees I set me right,
To greet this flower fresh as best I might,
Kneeling alway till it unclosèd was
Among the tender, sweet, and new-sprung grass,
That was with blossoms sweet embroidered all,
. . . . . .
In which methought that I might, day by day,
Dwell all throughout the jolly month of May,
Withouten sleep, withouten meat or drink :
Adown full softly I began to sink,
And, leaning on my elbow and my side,
Through the whole day I shaped me to abide,
For nothing else, and I shall tell no lie,
But on the daisy for to feed mine eye,
That has good reason why men call it may
The daisy, otherwise the eye of day,

The empress and the flower of flowers all:
I pray to God that fair may it befall,
And all that love the flowers for her sake!"

JOHN.

Happy flower, to have received the homage of Chaucer and Wordsworth! Happier, to have been ever the playmate and favorite of childhood! There is a true flavor of piety in the whole of the passage you have read, for he that loves the creature has made ready a shrine for the Creator in his heart. The leaf of a tree has a more moving exhortation to the love of God written upon it, than a leaf of Taylor or Barrow.

PHILIP.

Piety is indifferent whether she enters at the eye or the ear. There is none of the senses at which she does not knock one day or other. The Puritans forgot this, and thrust beauty out of the meeting-house and slammed the door in her face. I love such sensuality as that which Chaucer shows in his love of nature. Surely, God did not give us these fine senses as so many posterns to the heart for the Devil to enter at. I believe that he has endowed us with no faculty but for his own glory. If the Devil has got false keys to them, we must first have given him a model of the wards to make a mould by. The senses can do nothing unless the soul be an accomplice, and in whatever the soul does, the body will have a voice. In all ages it has been deemed a Christian virtue to persecute the body. Yet persecution is a sower of

dragon's teeth, from which spring armed men to do battle against her. We have driven the world and the flesh, against their wills, into a league with the Devil. If we provided ourselves with half as many arguments for loving God as we have against forgetting him, we should be both wiser and better. To be a sensualist in a certain kind and to a certain degree is the mark of a pure and youthful nature. To be able to keep a just balance between sense and spirit, and to have the soul welcome frankly all the delicious impulses which flow to it from without, is a good and holy thing. But it must welcome them as the endearments of a wife, not of a harlot. A Dryad and a Satyr may drink out of the same spring. A poet must be as sensitive as the yielding air, and as pure. To a soul which is truly king of itself, and not a prisoner in its desolate palace, the senses are but keepers of its treasury, and all beautiful things pay their tribute *through* these, and not *to* them. If they are allowed to squander the treasure upon their own lusts, the subjects turn niggard and withhold the supplies.

JOHN.

All things that make us happy incline us also to be grateful, and I would rather enlarge than lessen the number of these. Morose and callous recluses have persuaded men that religion is a prude, and have forced her to lengthen her face and contract her brows to suit the character. They have laid out a gloomy turnpike to heaven, upon which they and their heirs and assigns are privileged to levy tolls,

and have set up guide-boards to make us believe that all other roads lead in quite an opposite direction. The pleasanter they are, the more dangerous. For my part, I am satisfied that I am upon the right path so long as I can see anything to make me happier, anything to make me love man, and therefore God, the more. I would stamp God's name, and not Satan's, upon every innocent pleasure, upon every legitimate gratification of sense, and God would be the better served for it. In what has Satan deserved so well of us that we should set aside such first-fruits for him? Christianity differs not more widely from Plato than from the Puritans.

PHILIP.

The church needs reforming now as much as in Luther's time, and sells her indulgences as readily. There are altars to which the slaveholder is admitted, while the Unitarian would be put forth as unclean. If it be God's altar, both have a right there, — the sinner most of all, — but let him not go unrebuked. We hire our religion by the quarter, and if it tells any disagreeable truths, we dismiss it, for we did not pay it for such service as this. Christ scourged the sellers of doves out of the temple; we invite the sellers of men and women in. We have few such preachers now as Nathan was. They preach against sin in the abstract, shooting their arrows into the woundless air. Let sin wrap itself in superfine broadcloth, and put its name on charitable subscription-papers, and it is safe. We bandy compliments

with it, instead of saying sternly, "Get thee behind me!" The Devil might listen to some preaching I have heard, without getting his appetite spoiled. There is a great deal of time and money expended to make men believe that this one or that one will be damned, and to scare or wheedle them into good Calvinists or Episcopalians; but very little pains is taken to make them good Christians.

JOHN.

You use plain words.

PHILIP.

Plain words are best. Truth wants no veil; the chastity and beauty of her countenance are defence enough against all lewd eyes. Falsehood, only, needs to hide her face; for, that unseen, she has learned so well to mimic the gait and feign the voice of Truth as to counterfeit her with ease and safety. Our tongue has become so courtly and polite as well-nigh to have forgotten that it has also words befitting indignation and reproof. Some thoughts demand the utmost swell and voluptuousness of language; they should float like Aphrodite upborne on a summer ocean. For others, the words should be jagged and immitigable and abrupt, as the rocks upon the shore. Let the feeling of the moment choose. If melody be needed, the chance shell of the tortoise shall become a lyre which Apollo might sigh for.

JOHN.

It has never been a safe thing to breathe a whisper against the church, least of all in this country, where it has no prop from the state, but is founded only on the love, or, if you will have it so, the prejudices of the people. Religion has come to be esteemed synonymous with the church; there are few minds clear enough to separate it from the building erected for its convenience and its shelter. It is this which has made our Christianity external, a task-ceremony to be gone through with, and not a principle of life itself. The church has been looked on too much in the light of a machine, which only needs a little oil now and then on its joints and axles to make it run glibly and perform all its functions without grating or creaking. Nothing that we can say will be of much service. The reformers must come from her own bosom; and there are many devout souls among her priests now who would lay down their lives to purify her. The names of infidel and heretic are the *San benitos* in which we dress offenders in the nineteenth century, and a bigoted public opinion furnishes the fagots and applies the match! The very cross itself, to which the sacred right of private judgment fled for sanctuary, has been turned into a whipping-post. Doubtless there are no nations on the earth so wicked as those which profess Christianity; and the blame may be laid in great measure at the door of the church, which has always sought temporal power, and has chosen rather to lean upon the arm of flesh

than upon that of God. The church has corrupted Christianity. She has decked her person and embroidered her garments with the spoils of pagan altars, and has built her temples of blocks which paganism had squared ready to her hand. We are still Huns and Vandals, and Saxons and Celts, at heart. We have carved a cross upon our altars, but the smoke of our sacrifice goes up to Thor and Odin still. Lately I read in the newspapers a toast given at a military festival, by one of those who claim to be the earthly representatives of the Prince of Peace. England and France send out the cannon and the bayonet, upon missionary enterprises, to India and Africa, and our modern Eliots and Brainerds among the red men are of the same persuasive metal.

PHILIP.

Well, well, let us hope for change. There are signs of it; there has been a growling of thunder round the horizon for many days. We are like the people in countries subject to earthquakes, who crowd into the churches for safety, but find that their sacred walls are as fragile as other works of human hands. Nay, the very massiveness of their architecture makes their destruction more sudden and their fall more dangerous. You and I have become convinced of this. Both of us, having certain reforms at heart, and believing them to be of vital interest to mankind, turned first to the church as the nearest helper under God. We have been disappointed. Let us not waste our time in throw-

ing stones at its insensible doors. As you have said, the reformers must come from within. The prejudice of position is so strong that all her servants will unite against an exoteric assailant, melting up, if need be, the holy vessels for bullets, and using the leaves of the holy book itself for wadding. But I will never enter a church from which a prayer goes up for the prosperous only, or for the unfortunate among the oppressors and not for the oppressed and fallen; as if God had ordained our pride of caste and our distinctions of color, and as if Christ had forgotten those that are in bonds. We are bid to imitate God; let us in this also follow his example, whose only revenge upon error is the giving success to truth, and but strive more cheerfully for the triumph of what we believe to be right. Let us, above all things, imitate him in ascribing what we see of wrong-doing to blindness and error rather than to wilful sin. The Devil loves nothing better than the intolerance of reformers, and dreads nothing so much as their charity and patience. The scourge is better upon our backs than in our hands.

JOHN.

When the air grows thick and heavy, and the clouds gather in the moral atmosphere, the tall steeples of the church are apt to attract the lightning first. Its pride and love of high places are the most fatal of conductors. That small upper room, in which the disciples were first gathered, would always be safe enough.

PHILIP.

We have wandered too far among these thorns and briers; let us come back to smoother ground. There are one or two passages in the "Legend of Good Women" which I will read to you. My translations are very bald, but I adhere as closely as I can to the very words of my author. The number of accented syllables and terminations in Chaucer's time renders any translation from his poems necessarily less compact and precise than the original. I must often, too, lose much of the harmony of the verse; but I shall not try to conciliate your ear at the expense of faithfulness. Here is a fragment from his story of Thisbe. Pyramus has found her bloody wimple.

"He smote him to the heart;
The blood out of the wound as broad did start
As water when the conduit broken is.
Now Thisbe, who knew nothing yet of this,
But sitting in her dread, bethought her thus:
'If it so fall out that my Pyramus
Have hastened hither and may me not find,
He may esteem me false or eke unkind.'
And out she comes, and after him espies
Both with her anxious heart and with her eyes,
And thought, 'Now will I tell him my distress,
For fear of death and of the lioness.'
And at the last, her lover hath she found,
Abeating with his heels upon the ground,
All bloody; and therewith she back doth start,
And like the waves to heave began her heart,
And, in a moment, pale as box she grew;

Then looking steadily, right well she knew
That it was Pyramus, her own heart's dear.
"Who could write ever what a deadly cheer
Hath Thisbe now, and how her hair she rent,
And how herself began she to torment,
And how she lies and swoons upon the ground,
And how with tears she fillèd full his wound,
How clippeth she the blood-red corse, alas!
How doth the woful Thisbe in this case!
How kisseth she his frosty mouth so cold!
'Who hath done this? O, who hath been so bold,
To slay my love? O, speak, my Pyramus!
I am thy Thisbe that thee calleth thus!'
And therewithal she lifted up his head.
This woful man, who was not wholly dead,
Hearing that one the name of Thisbe cries,
On her cast up his heavy, deadly eyes,
Then down again, and yielded up the ghost.
Thisbe rose up withouten noise or boast,
And saw her wimple and his empty sheath,
And eke his sword that him hath done to death;
Then spake she thus; 'My woful hand,' quoth she,
'Is strong enough in such a work for me;
For love will give me strength and hardiness
To make my wound full large enough, I guess.
I will thee follow dead, and I will be
Partaker of the death I caused,' quoth she,
'And although nothing but the death could ever
Have force enough thyself and me to sever,
Thou shalt no more be parted now from me,
Than from thy death; for I will follow thee.'"

In choosing my extracts, I have endeavored to avoid those which have been already modernized by

others. A volume was published in London three or four years ago, by R. H. Horne, containing new versions of some of the best of Chaucer's poems. Many of these are excellent, those by Wordsworth especially. The original plan seems to have been to publish other volumes, till a complete translation should be accomplished. As no continuation has appeared, we must presume that the English have not yet awakened to the merits of their first great poet. Mr. Charles Cowden Clarke deserves well of the lovers of our language for his excellent little volumes entitled "The Riches of Chaucer," which contain all the better parts of his poems.

JOHN.

He has another claim upon our esteem, also, as having been the earliest friend and admirer of Keats.

PHILIP.

In the next legend, of Dido, there are a few lines which I must read you for their delightful freshness and spirit.

"Upon a lowly palfrey, paper-white,
With saddle red, embroidered with delight,
Of gold the bars, upward embossèd high,
Sat Dido, rough with gold and jewelry;
And she is fair as is the bright to-morrow,
That healeth sick folk of the night's long sorrow.
Upon a courser, startling as the fire,
Though men might turn him with a little wire,
Æneas sat, like Phœbus."

JOHN.

How delicious is that comprehensive description of Dido's beauty! It fills the heart at once with a thousand images and forewarnings of delight, as the sight of beauty itself does.

PHILIP.

Yes, beauty seldom affects us so much in the present as by a prophecy of some yet unfulfilled satisfaction which she has in store for us. She seems to beckon us ever into yet more Elysian realms of quiet and serenity, and is but the guide to something higher and beyond.

JOHN.

"Startling as the fire" gives us such a picture as inspires and dilates the imagination. Shakspeare's famous description of a horse, in his "Venus and Adonis," with all its minuteness, does not satisfy me as well as this. It seems rather like the fine frenzy of an inspired jockey. In such slight and ordinary touches the power of the poet is best shown. A great subject may lift up even a common and earthy mind, and give it an inspiring breadth of view. But this is only from isolated peaks and summits, in climbing to which the enthusiasm wearies and flags. But the strength of a great poet is in his own magnificent eye, which borrows not from without, but lends whatever it looks on a dignity and an untiring grace from within. Every word of his is like a new-created star or flower, or a new-found one, and sets all our

nature astir, as the spring wakes and enlivens the sluggish earth. The heart grows green again and blossoms; the old tendrils of childish sympathy become as supple and delicate as ever, and, reaching out, grasp and cling to whatever they first chance to touch.

PHILIP.

You will never describe it. We can never say why we love, but only that we love. The heart is ready enough at feigning excuses for all that it does or imagines of wrong; but ask it to give a reason for any of its beautiful and divine motions, and it can only look upward and be dumb. When we are in the right, we can never reason, but only assert. A weak cause generally has the best in an argument. As you have been so much struck with some isolated expressions used by Chaucer, I will glean a few others for you. It is a pity to knock the jewels out of their setting, but they will shine notwithstanding. Here is a passage from "The Knight's Tale," describing the temple of Mars.

"A forest first was painted on the wall,
In which there dwells nor man, nor beast at all,
With trees all knotty, knarry, barren, old,
With sharp, dead limbs and hideous to behold,
Through which there ran a rumble and a sough,
As if the wind would shatter every bough."

There is no such desolation as this in all Lord Byron's nightmare "darkness."

"There saw I first the dark imagining
Of Felony, and all the compassing;
The cruel ire, as any coal aglow;
The pickpurse, and the palefaced dread alsò;
The smiler with the knife under the cloak;
The stables burning in the ink-black smoke;
The treason of the murdering in the bed;
The open war with wounds all overbled;
Contest with bloody knife and sharp menàce;
And full of ill sounds was that sorry place.
The slayer of himself, too, saw I there,
His thick heart's blood hath bathèd all his hair,
The nail fast-driven through the hair beside,
The cold death with the mouth all gaping wide:
And in the temple's midst there sat Mischance,
With pain at heart and sorry countenance;
There saw I Madness, laughing in his rage;
Armèd complaint, outcries, and fierce outràge;
The carrion in the bush with throat cut through;
A thousand slain whom sickness never slew;
The tyrant with the prey his force had reft;
The town destroyed, that there was nothing left;
There burned the ships that danced upon the main;
There lay the hunter by the wild bears slain;
The sow tearing the child right in the cradle;
The cook scalded, in spite of his long ladle;
Naught was forgot of all the woes of war,
The charioteer, o'erridden by his car,
Under the wheel full low was cast adown.
There also were, of Mars' division,
The armorer, the bowyer, and the smith,
Who forgeth the sharp swords upon his stith;
And, painted in a tower that rose on high,
Conquest I saw, that sat in sovereignty,

While that keen blade did waver o'er his head,
Ahanging by a slender strand of thread."

Mars is described standing upon a chariot,

"A wolf there stood before him at his feet,
With fire-red eyes, and of a man did eat."

You will hardly find in Spenser a catalogue like this, so grim and so straightforward. Here is no flourish; but Chaucer only tells us, or tries to tell us, what he saw. It is abrupt and disjointed, as if recalled piecemeal by an effort of memory.

JOHN.

I do not overlike personifications, as they are called, yet I shall not soon forget this one of Conquest, sitting under the sword of Damocles. But what have the sow, and the cook with his long ladle, to do in the picture?

PHILIP.

Tyrwhitt is as much puzzled as you, but hazards a conjecture that Chaucer was having a sly laugh at the tedious particularity of the Romancers. But I hardly think so, since to me this couplet adds a certain tang and pungency to the taste of the whole passage. It gives it reality, and makes it seem less like a work of the imagination. We are loath to fancy so dainty a faculty as the imagination sweeping the greasy floor of the kitchen with her majestic robes; and so we are fain to believe that the poet is merely giving us a literal account of what he saw.

JOHN.

You have made me a little more liberal in these matters of taste than I once was. The sow eating the child, which the nurse has left deserted in the cradle, gives me as intense an idea of the horror of war and of the selfishness which danger inculcates, as it is possible to conceive. Horror is poetical. It is the gin and opium of the Muse; the excitement and thrill are not unpleasing for once or twice. But a ludicrous idea is inadmissible; it must smooth the grin and smirk off its face before it can get entrance into the silent and serene temple of song.

PHILIP.

Ay, but there is no court-dress there. Words and phrases are vulgar or trivial according to the ear on which they fall. I confess that I have an ear that will gladly entertain anything that comes plainly and unmasked, and does not impose itself as something superior to what it truly is. There are Nimrods enough of words and syllables, without my joining in the hunt. The Muse can breathe as august melodies through an oaten straw as she can win from Apollo's lute. Chaucer is never very choice in his language for the mere sake of being so. He is so rich that he can afford a plain simpleness which would be the badge of beggary in a poorer man. He is plain and blunt, and speaks to the point. He thrusts his foot remorselessly through the gossamers of sentimental fancy, though he might have spared them for their making the dew of heaven more visible. When Arcite is dead,

"'Why wouldest thou be dead,' the women cry,
'That haddest gold enough, and Emily?'"

"That *haddest gold enough* — and Emily." See how the actual life, the life of debtor and creditor, of the butcher and baker, intrudes itself upon the life of romance, nay, takes precedence of it in the mind of this unartificial man. The means first, be they never so humble and prosaic; and then the poetic end, which casts backward a lustre and a glory upon them. This simplicity of his reminds me of Homer, who gives a bill of fare of all the feasts, as one whose calling had made him sensible of the merits of such delicates by their infrequency.

In "The Pardoner's Tale" there is a most graphic simile, which modern taste would probably censure as deficient in dignity. The Pardoner is describing his style of preaching:

"Then do I preach as ye have heard before,
And tell a hundred idle stories more;
Then do I pain me to stretch forth my neck,
And east and west upon the people I beck,
As doth a dove sitting upon a barn."

Here is another specimen of his simplicity, from the third book of his "Troilus and Creseide":

"Consider now if they be not to blame,
This kind of folk, — what shall I call them, what? —
That boast of women's favors, and by name,
Who yet have granted them nor this nor that,
Nor think more of them than of my old hat."

And, a little further on,

"But, if a fool were in a jealous rage,
I would not *set his sorrow at a mite.*"

Speaking of oracles, Pandarus says,

"As for Apollo, and his servants' laws,
Or oracles, they are not worth three straws.
For the gods speak in amphibologies,
And for one truth they tell us twenty lies."

Describing Cressid, too, his frankness peeps out:

"Somewhat too low might Cressid's stature be,
But for her shape and face, and eke her cheer,
Creature there never was more fair than she;
And oftentimes her manner was, to appear
With all her hair hanging in tresses clear
Down by her collar o'er her neck behind,
Which with a thread of gold she would upbind.
And, *saving that her brows were joined too near*,
There was no lack in aught I can espy."

JOHN.

Chaucer is as close and determined an imitator of nature as Poussin, who used to bring home stones and moss in his handkerchief, in order to paint them exactly. Such scrupulous honesty betokens the true artist, who is a mathematician in his details, and only lays claim to the title of creator by his fresh and beautiful combinations.

PHILIP.

Now let me glean a few striking expressions which you cannot but admire. When Cressid was carried to the Grecian camp, she had promised Troilus to steal back to him upon a certain evening, and for

some time clings to her promise. But Chaucer says that, ere two full months, the thought of Troilus and Troy

"*Throughout her heart shall knotless slide.*"

We never feel the whole bitterness of a sorrow at the first blow. It is after we have recovered from the sudden shock of it, and the imagination has leisure to concern itself with details, that we know its whole depth and breadth. Then we find that the little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, has spread itself over our whole heaven. Chaucer has hinted at this, in what he says of Troilus.

"And, as in winter, when the leaves are reft,
Each after other, till the trees are bare,
So that there are but bark and branches left,
So Troilus, bereft of each welfàre,
Lies bounden in the ugly bark of care."

When Troilus is first brought to an interview with Cressid, Pandarus

"Drew him to the fire,
And by that light beheld his countenance,
As 't were to look upon an old romance."

JOHN.

That last is exquisite. The eager flush of love, and the warm, flickering light of the fire upon Troilus's face, scarcely more wavering and uncertain than the expression there, — the whole picture, in short, seems like an old romance with its illuminated borders and capitals, and its stories of love and

sorrow. You will not easily find me another comparison like this.

PHILIP.

At least here is one that touches me more. It is in "The Complaint of Annelida," who has been deserted by "the false Arcite." She says,

> "Arcite hath *borne away the key*
> *Of all my world, and my good hap to come.*"

There is something very pathetic in this.

JOHN.

Yes. As if she stood in sight of the fair maiden world she had left for the sake of Arcite, and but just on the outside of happiness, yet was irrevocably locked out.

PHILIP.

In "The Book of the Duchess" there is one of the most beautiful portraits of a woman that were ever drawn. Full of life it is, and of graceful health, with no romantic hectic or sentimental languish. It is such a figure as you would never look for in a ball-room, but might expect to meet in the dewy woods, just after sunrise, when you were hunting for late violets. The lover, who tells Chaucer of her, says,

> "I was caught
> So suddenly, that I ne'er took
> Counsel of aught but of her look,
> And of my heart: for her kind eyes
> So gladly on my heart did rise,
> That instantly my inmost thought
> Said it were better serve her for naught,
> Than with another to be well."

It is too long for me to read you the whole of it, but I will gladden your heart with a few lines here and there. I shall hardly more than modernize the words. I should spoil it were I to attempt to translate it into smooth verses. See how joyfully it opens:

"I saw her dance so comely,
Carol and sing so sweetly,
Laugh and play so womanly,
And look so debonairly,
So goodly speak, and so friendly,
That, certes, I trow that nevermore
Was seen so blissful a treasòre;
For every hair upon her head,
Sooth to say, it was not red,
And neither yellow nor brown it was,
Methought most like to gold it was;
And such eyes my lady had,
Debonair, good, steady, and glad,
Simple, of good size, not too wide;
And then her look was not aside,
Nor wandering, but so right and true,
That, certes, it took up and drew
All that upon her 'gan behold.

. . . . .

Even when most full of joy was she,
She never could look foolishly,
Nor wildly, even when she played;
But ever, methought, her kind eyes said,
'*Par fay*, my wrath is all forgiven.'

. . . . .

I have not wit that can suffice
Her beauty to speak properly,

But thus much I dare say, that she
Was white, fresh, ruddy, and lively-hued.
And every day her beauty newed.

. . . . .

And thereto she could so well play
Whate'er she list, that I dare say,
That she was like a torch-flame bright,
Whence every man can take of light
Enough, and it hath never the less
Of lustre and of comeliness.

. . . . .

She had a wit so general,
So whole inclinèd to all good,
That it was ever set by the rood,
To swell the store of happiness;
Moreover, I ne'er saw one less
Harmful than she to say or do ;
I say not that she did not know
What evil was, or else had she
Known naught of good, as seems to me.

. . . . .

"Methought all fellowship was naked,
Without her, having seen her once,
As is a crown without the stones."

JOHN.

It is like sunshine. It awakens all the dearest and sweetest recollections of the heart. The best poetry always comes to us leading by the hand the holy associations and tear-strengthened aspirings of youth, as Volumnia brought to Coriolanus his little children, to plead reproachfully with us, to be tender, and meek, and patient. "Chevy Chase" was like the blast of

a trumpet to Sir Philip Sidney; the passages I love in the poets give me back an hour of childhood, and are like a mother's voice to me. They are as solemn as the rustle of the Bible-leaves in the old family-prayers. The noisy ocean of life hushes, and slides up his beach with a soothing and slumberous ripple. The earth becomes secluded and private to me as in childhood, when it seemed but a little meadow-green, guarded all round with trees, for me to pick flowers in; a playroom, whose sole proprietor and manager I was. When Chaucer wrote this poem he must have been musing of his early love. How could critic ever grow so leathern-hearted as to speak sneeringly of love-verses ?

PHILIP.

I cannot guess. They are often blamed for their egoism, when, in fact, they are the least egoistical of all writing. If self is anywhere forgotten, it is in these. They are all hymns to the supreme beauty. In all of them the lover would only remind the beloved that their trysting-place is at the foot of that divine altar. The one I have just read a fragment of reminds me of a passage in George Withers's "Philarette" which, both in metre and expression, is brimful of the most joyous simplicity and extravagant fancy. All through it, the poet's heart seems to dance for glee, like a child. A truly Arcadian sunshine broods over it. I could think it written before such a thing as sorrow was invented. It is one of those sweet nooks into which the mind can with-

draw from the turmoil and hurry of life, and play with the grass and flowers in ungirt ease.

Let me read you now, from "The Legend of Cleopatra," something of a very different kind. It is a bustling description of a sea-fight.

"And in the middle sea they chanced to meet;
Up goes the trump; with shots and shouts they greet,
And hasten them to set on with the sun;
With grisly sound outgoeth the great gun,
And heartily they hurtle in all at once;
And from the top down tumble the great stones;
In go the grappling-irons full of crooks;
Among the thick ropes run the sheering-hooks;
In with the pole-axe presseth he and he;
Behind the mast beginneth he to flee,
And out again, and overboard him drives;
Through this one's side the ragged spear-point rives:
This rends the sail with sharp hooks like a scythe,
This brings the cup and biddeth them be blithe,
This on the hatches poureth slippery pease,
With pots of lime together struggle these,
And thus the whole long day in fight they spend."

In "The Knight's Tale" there is another very much like this, except that the scene is on land.

"The heralds leave their pricking up and down,
And rings the trumpet loud and clarion;
There is no more to say, but, east and west,
Down go the lances to their stubborn rest,
Plunges the sharp spur in the horse's side,
Now see we who can joust and who can ride;
There shiver shafts upon the bucklers thick,
And through the heart is felt the deadly prick;

Up spring the lances twenty feet in height,
Out go the sword-blades as the silver bright ;
The helmets tough they hew and hack and shred,
Out bursts the heart's blood in stern torrents red ;
With mighty maces through the bones they crush,
And 'mid the thickest of the throng 'gin rush ;
There stumble the strong steeds, and down goes all,
And under foot they roll as doth a ball ;
One with a truncheon foileth at his foe,
And one him hurtleth from his horse full low ;
One through the body is hurt, and they him take,
Maugre his head, and bear him to the stake
As was agreed, and there he must abide."

JOHN.

They remind me of some of Leigh Hunt's descriptions, though he sometimes dwindles a little too much into the inventory style, and counts the nails in the horses' shoes, and the wrinkles in the knights' tunics. Yet no man has ever understood the delicacies and luxuries of language better than he, and his thoughts often have all the rounded grace and shifting lustre of a dove's neck.

PHILIP.

He is often too refined to be easily understood by the mob of readers. He is tracing out the nerves and veinlets, when it had been better for his popularity if he had developed only the muscles and arteries. There is a great difference between being too refined and too minute ; and he is as often the one as the other. He gathers together, kernel by kernel, a bushel of corn, and then wonders why we

do not admire his picture of a cornfield. Keats and Tennyson are both masters of description, but Keats had the finer ear for all the nice analogies and suggestions of sound, while his eye had an equally instinctive rectitude of perception in color. Tennyson's epithets suggest a silent picture; Keats' the very thing itself, with its sound or stillness.

JOHN.

I remember a stanza of Tennyson's which unites these excellences.

"A still, salt pool, locked in with bars of sand,
Left on the shore; which hears all night
The plunging seas draw backward from the land
Their moon-led waters white."

PHILIP.

That is one of the most perfect images in any language, and as a picture of a soul made lonely and selfish by indulgence in over-refined philosophizing, it is yet more exquisite. But if Tennyson's mind be more sensitive, Keats' is grander and of a larger grasp. It may be a generation or two before there comes another so delicate thinker and speaker as Tennyson; but it will be centuries before another nature so spontaneously noble and majestic as that of Keats and so tender and merciful too, is embodied. What a scene of despair is that of his, where Saturn finds the vanquished Titans!

"Scarce images of life, one here, one there,
Lay vast and edgeways, like a dismal cirque

Of Druid-stones upon a forlorn moor,
When the chill rain begins at shut of eve,
In dull November —''

And what can be more perfect than this?

"So far her voice flowed on, like timorous brook,
That, lingering along a pebbled coast,
Doth fear to meet the sea; but sea it met,
And shuddered; for the overwhelming voice
Of huge Enceladus swallowed it in wrath:
The ponderous syllables, like sullen waves
In the half-glutted hollows of reef-rocks,
Came booming thus.''

JOHN.

The world is not yet aware of the wonderful merit of Keats. Men have squabbled about Chatterton, and written lives of Kirke White, while they have treated with contempt the rival and, I will dare to say, the sometimes superior, of Milton. The critics gravely and with reverence hold up their bit of smoked glass between you and the lantern at a kite's tail, and bid you behold the sun, undazzled; but their ceremonious fooleries will one day be as ridiculous as those of the Tahitian priests. Keats can afford to wait, and he will yet be sacred to the hearts of all those who love the triumphs and ovations of our noble mother-tongue.

PHILIP.

I must please myself with one more quotation from his "Hyperion." After the murmur among the Titans at Saturn's entrance has ceased,

"Saturn's voice therefrom
Grew up like organ, that begins anew
Its strain, when other harmonies *stopped short*,
Leave the dinned air vibrating silverly."

Could sound and sense harmonize more fitly? In reading it, the voice flows on at first smoothly and equably. At the end of the third verse it pauses abruptly in spite of itself, and in the last vibrates and wavers in accordance with the meaning. You see the art with which the word "vibrating" is placed so as to prevent you from reading the verse monotonously. Among the ancient poets, I can detect none of the nice feeling of language which distinguishes many of our own. I recognize it in that oft-quoted passage in Æschylus, where Prometheus invokes

"ποντίων τε κυμάτων
ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα,"

in which the long roll of the first syllables, the liquid sound of *ἀνήριθμον*, and the plashing ripple of *γέλασμα*, seem to convey some audible suggestion of the sea. Now and then I fancy I can trace a few similar glimpses in Ovid, who is to me the truest poet among the Latins, but they would probably elude any but a partial ear. Beside this passage of Æschylus, I would set one from Spenser.

"With that the rolling sea, resounding soft,
In his big base, then fitly answerèd,
And on the rocks the waves breaking aloft,
A solemne meane unto them measured,
The whiles sweet Zephyrus loud whisteled
His treble."

L. of C.

I cannot doubt but the hissing sound given to the fifth verse by the number of *s*-s was intentional.

JOHN.

There is a line in Longfellow's ballad of "The Wreck of the Hesperus," which has always pleased both my imagination and my ear.

PHILIP.

I think I know which one you mean. I will repeat it at a venture. It is the last of these two:

> "And a whooping billow swept her crew,
> Like icicles from her deck."

Am I right?

JOHN.

Yes. I do not like the epithet "*whooping*" in the first verse, but I consider the whole of the last admirable. A single happy epithet is always worth a folio of description; and in this the word "icicles" tells me the whole story.

PHILIP.

I like it as much as you do.

JOHN.

In Leigh Hunt's "Hero and Leander" there is a descriptive verse which I esteem one of the rarest of its kind. Hero is expecting Leander on the last fatal night.

> "Hero looked forth, and trembling augured ill,
> *The darkness held its breath so very still.*"

PHILIP.

In this there is the great merit that the ideas suggested give vigor and support to the mere external significance. It is very natural that Hero should personify the darkness, and attribute an evil intent to it; and one who meditates or strikes a revengeful blow holds in his breath. There is another version of Musæus's story, by Marlow and Chapman, which is crowded full of beauties. Here are a few lines in point.

"Buskins of shells all silvered usèd she,
And branched with blushing coral to the knee;
Where sparrows perched, of hollow pearl and gold,
Such as the world would wonder to behold;
These with sweet water oft her handmaid fills,
Which, as she went, would cherup through their bills."

This is a gift of Marlow's luxurious fancy. He throws down such by the handful. The last verse, you see, illustrates the topic we have sauntered to. I remember that John S. Dwight, who has a very refined insight in such matters, commends Bryant for his excellence in descriptive epithets, and quotes, in support of his opinion, this verse:

"With valleys *scooped* between."

This is one of those epithets whose beauty lies in its simplicity and plainness. Ordinary poets, having a natural fellow-feeling with ordinary objects, strive to elevate them by a lofty scaffolding of words, not being able to conceive that the most natural image (so it

be drawn from nothing in itself base) is always the most noble. They buckle the *cothurnus* upon the feet of a dwarf, and make him ridiculous by the enforced majesty of his gait. The true poet picks up a common reed and entices ravishing melody from it. Humbleness is always grace, always dignity. The propriety and force of the epithet quoted above is confirmed by its having occurred to another mind, also a highly poetical one. Wesley, in his Journal, says:

"The place in which I preached was an oval spot of ground, surrounded with spreading trees, *scooped out*, as it were, in the side of a hill, which rose round like a theatre." — *Southey's Life of Wesley* (American Edition), II., 49.

Before we lay down Chaucer, let me read a few more passages. In "The Man of Law's Tale" there is a terribly graphic stanza:

"Have ye not sometimes seen a pallid face,
Among a press, of him that hath been led
Toward his death where he can hope no grace,
And such a color in his face hath had,
That men might know him that was so bested,
Among the crowd of faces in that rout?
So Constance stands and looketh her about."

Chaucer had a great deal of what is called knowledge of the world, but it never rendered him sour or contemptuous. Whenever he turns his eye that way, his glance softens with pity or with a good-humored

smile. In "The Story of Cambuscan bold," he describes the crowd who gathered about the wonderful brazen horse, each one of whom, in proportion to his ignorance, is anxious to express an opinion about it. He ends by saying:

> "As unlearned people fancy commonly,
> Of whatsoever thing may chance to be
> More subtly made than they can comprehend,
> *They gladly set it down for some bad end.*"

I am merely reading at random such passages as strike me. In "The Pardoner's Tale" Chaucer describes Death as a weary old man, in a compassionate kind of way that makes us pity him. Three riotous fellows have sworn to be revenged upon Death, if they can find him. Presently they meet an old man (Death himself) who says to them:

> "For I cannot find
> A man, though I should walk to farthest Ind,
> Either in any city or villàge,
> That would exchange his youth for my old age;
> And therefore must I keep mine old age still,
> As long a time as it is God's good will;
> Even Death, alas! my poor life will not have.
> Thus do I wander like a restless slave,
> And on the earth, which is my mother's gate,
> Thus knock I with my staff, early and late,
> And say to her, 'Leave, mother, let me in;
> Lo, how I vanish, flesh, and blood, and skin!
> Alas! when shall my old bones be at rest?'"

JOHN.

Death has been hardly ever so tenderly spoken of. It is singular what ugly portraits of him are ordinarily given us. There seems to be but little living faith in the immortality of the soul; so soon does any idea become formal and external, when diluted by the customariness of a creed. Men do not believe in the next world as they do in London or Boston; they do not launch upon the *ignotum mare* with a shadow of that prophetic belief which girded up the heart of Columbus. Most religion-mongers have baited their paradises with a bit of toasted cheese. They have tempted the body with large promise of possessions in their transmortal El Dorado. Sancho Panza will not quit his chimney-corner but under promise of imaginary islands to govern. For my own part, I think it wiser to make the spirit a staff for the body, than the body for the spirit. When the vessel casts off for the voyage, and the body finds itself left behind, it may well cry out and disturb the whole vicinage with the story of its wrong.

PHILIP.

I agree with you that the body is treated with quite too much ceremony and respect. Even religion has vailed its politic hat to it, till, like Christopher Sly, it is metamorphosed, in its own estimation, from a tinker to a duke. Men who would, without compunction, kick a living beggar, will yet stand in awe

of his poor carcass after all that rendered it truly venerable has fled out of it. We agree with the old barbarian epitaph which affirmed that the handful of dust had been Ninus; as if that which convicts us of mortality and weakness could at the same time endow us with our high prerogative of kingship over them. South, in one of his sermons, tells us of certain men whose souls are of no worth, but as salt to keep their bodies from putrefying. I fear that the soul is too often regarded in this sutler fashion. Why should men ever be afraid to die, but that they regard the spirit as secondary to that which is but its mere appendage and conveniency, its symbol, its word, its means of visibility? If the soul lose this poor mansion of hers by the sudden conflagration of disease, or by the slow decay of age, is she therefore houseless and shelterless? If she cast away this soiled and tattered garment, is she therefore naked? A child looks forward to his new suit, and dons it joyfully; we cling to our rags and foulness. We should welcome Death as one who brings us tidings of the finding of long-lost titles to a large family estate, and set out gladly to take possession, though, it may be, not without a natural tear for the humbler home we are leaving. Death always means us a kindness, though he has often a gruff way of offering it. Even if the soul never returned from that chartless and unmapped country, which I do not believe, I would take Sir John Davies's reason as a good one:

"But, as Noah's pigeon, which returned no more,
Did show she footing found, for all the flood;
So, when good souls, departed through death's door,
Come not again, it shows their dwelling good."

The realm of Death seems an enemy's country to most men, on whose shores they are loathly driven by stress of weather; to the wise man it is the desired port where he moors his bark gladly, as in some quiet haven of the Fortunate Isles; it is the golden west into which his sun sinks, and, sinking, casts back a glory upon the leaden cloud-rack which had darkly besieged his day.

After all, the body is a more expert dialectician than the soul, and buffets it, even to bewilderment, with the empty bladders of logic; but the soul can retire from the dust and turmoil of such conflict to the high tower of instinctive faith, and there, in hushed serenity, take comfort of the sympathizing stars. We look at death through the cheap-glazed windows of the flesh, and believe him for the monster which the flawed and crooked glass presents him. You say truly that we have wasted time in trying to coax the body into a faith in what, by its very nature, it is incapable of comprehending. Hence a plethoric, short-winded kind of belief, that can walk at any easy pace over the smooth plain, but loses breath at the first sharp uphill of life. How idle is it to set a sensual bill of fare before the soul, acting over again the old story of the crane and the fox!

JOHN.

I know not when we shall hear pure spiritualism preached by the authorized expounders of doctrine, These have suffered the grain to mildew, while they have been wrangling about the husks of form; and the people have stood by, hungry and half-starved, too intent on the issue of the quarrel to be conscious that they were trampling the forgotten and scattered bread of life in the mire. Thank Heaven, they may still pluck ripe ears of God's own planting and watering in the fields!

In the conclusion to Raleigh's "History of the World," there is a passage concerning Death which rolls on with the muffled grandeur of a funeral march. There is something in it which always affects me strangely. I must repeat it to you.

"O eloquent, just, and mighty Death! whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised; thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, — *Hic Jacet!*"

PHILIP.

Magnificent, truly! — I have but one more promise yet to fulfil, and that is to read you an extract from "Troilus and Creseide," modernized by Wordsworth. I shall select a few verses, leaving you to read the rest at your leisure. After Cressid has left

Troy, Troilus goes in secret to see once more her house, where they had been wont to meet.

"Then said he thus: — 'O palace desolate!
O house of houses, once so richly dight!
O palace empty and disconsolate!
Thou lamp, of which extinguished is the light!
O palace, whilom day, that now art night!
Thou ought'st to fall, and I to die, since she
Is gone who held us both in sovereignty.

"'O of all houses once the crowned boast!
Palace illumined with the sun of bliss!
O ring, of which the ruby now is lost!
O cause of woe, that cause hast been of bliss!
Yet, since I may no better, would I kiss
Thy cold doors; but I dare not for this rout:
Farewell, thou shrine, of which the saint is out!'

. . . . . .

"Forth from the spot he rideth up and down,
And everything to his rememberance
Came, as he rode by places of the town
Where he had felt such perfect pleasure once.
'Lo, yonder saw I mine own lady dance,
And in that temple she with her bright eyes,
My lady dear, first bound me captivewise;

"'And yonder, with joy-smitten heart, have I
Heard my own Cressid's laugh; and once at play
I yonder saw her eke full blissfully;
And yonder once she unto me 'gan say,
"Now, my sweet Troilus, love me well, I pray!"
And there so graciously did me behold,
That hers unto the death my heart I hold.

" ' And at the corner of that selfsame house
Heard I my most beloved lady dear,
So womanly, with voice melodious
Singing so well, so goodly, and so clear,
That in my soul, methinks, I yet do hear
The blissful sound ; and in that very place
My lady first me took unto her grace.'

. . . . . .

" Another time he took into his head
That every wight, who in the way passed by,
Had of him ruth, and fancied that they said,
' I am right sorry Troilus will die ! '

. . . . . .

" And every night, as he was wont to do,
Troilus stood the bright moon to behold ;
And all his trouble to the moon he told,
And said, ' I wis, when thou art horned anew,
I shall be glad if all the world be true.'

. . . . . .

" Upon the walls fast also would he walk,
To the end that he the Grecian host might see ;
And ever thus he to himself would talk :—
' Lo, yonder is mine own bright lady free ;
Or yonder is it that the tents must be ;
And thence doth come this air, that is so sweet
That in my heart I feel the joy of it.

" ' And certainly this wind, that more and more,
By moments, thus increaseth in my face,
Is of my lady's sighs heavy and sore :
I prove it thus ; for, in no other space,
Of all this town, save only in this place,
Feel I a wind that soundeth so like pain ;
It saith, " Alas ! why severed are we twain ? " ' ' "

I venture to say that you know nothing in English (and if not in that, surely in no other language) rarer in its kind than this. I have made only one change in it, a merely literal one, substituting "doth" for "does," in the sixth line of the last stanza but one. The euphony of the verse seemed to me to demand it. And this leads us back again to the beginning of our conversation. Here is an archaism which the rabble of sibilant sounds in our language not only excuses, but renders necessary, even if an argument might not be legitimately drawn from the loss which melody feels in the banishment of the soft termination *th*.

JOHN.

What a sweet fancy is that of Troilus about the wind! It reminds one of Romeo. I agree with you about the termination *th*, nor do I think that these little niceties and refinements of language are beneath the dignity of serious study and argument. A stray hair, by its continued irritation, may give more annoyance than a smart blow.

PHILIP.

In many words this termination is necessary to give sufficient prolongation to the sound, as in "linger-eth," "murmur-eth," "wander-eth," "abid-eth," words denoting a continuance of action, and which are defrauded of their just amount of expression by being squeezed into a compacter form, and set off with the fizz of an *s* at the end, as in

"wanders," "murmurs," and "lingers." Where plaintiveness of tone is demanded, the sweet gravity of this termination should always plead for its use. It is one of the excellencies of our language. In some words it were manifestly out of place, as in "whistles," "stops," "hisses," "slides." In the dramatic form, too, it should be sparingly employed. There we mostly want directness, plainness, and force, and such exquisiteness would seem like finery and foppishness. The sentiment, demanding, as it always does, the keenest and most delicate sympathy from the diction, must decide without appeal in such cases. Milton shows the sensitiveness of his ear most in his earlier poems, especially in "Comus" and "Lycidas." It is remarkable that his blindness seems rather to have lessened than increased this faculty in him. Perhaps our noble philanthrope, Dr. Howe, could explain this. His "Samson Agonistes" is singularly harsh and unmusical, and often far less metrical than the sonorous and enthusiastical sentences which jut out continually above the level of his prose. Coleridge well expressed Shakspeare's mastery over language when he said that you could no more detrude a word from one of his verses than you could push out a brick from the side of a house with your finger. Sometimes the language of a whole play seems to be pervaded and tempered by a prevailing sentiment. I have always thought so of that most sombre of his tragedies, "Richard the Second." There is little of his Titanic, heaven-scaling boldness of metaphor and expression in it; all is grave, sub-

dued, and mournful, and you read it under your voice, as if in a funeral chamber.

I fear that I have spoken too harshly of the letter *s*. It often adds much to the expression of a verse, — in the word "silence," for example. It is only by the contrast of some slight noise that we can appreciate silence. A solitude is never so lonely as when the wind sighs through it. This is suggested to the ear, and so to the imagination, by the sound of the word. Keats, therefore, did well in bringing together such a cohort of *s*-s in the opening of his "Hyperion":

> "Deep in the *s*hady *s*tillne*ss* of a vale,
> Far *s*unken from the healthy breath of morn,
> Far from the fiery noon and eve'*s* one *s*tar,
> *S*at gray-haired *S*aturn, *s*ilent a*s* a *s*tone,
> *S*till a*s* the *s*ilen*c*e round about hi*s* lair."

Do you not feel it? The whole passage, for some distance farther on, is full of this sighing melody, and so impresses me with its utter loneliness and desertion that, after repeating it to myself when alone, I am relieved to hear the companionable flicker of the fire, or the tinkling fall of an ember. The same is observable in the first lines of Drummond's Tenth Sonnet, and, indeed, throughout the whole of it:

> "Sleep, Silence' child, sweet father of soft rest,
> Prince whose approach peace to all mortals brings
> Indifferent host to shepherds and to kings."

Here we feel a kind of hushing sound, as if preluding sleep, conveyed by the *s*-s and the *c*-s. You must remember that I am speaking of silence as it impresses the *ear* only; for its effect often receives a reinforcement from he *eye* also, as in the African deserts, which, though they seem the very extreme of stillness by day, when the eye can appreciate their utter loneliness, would not appear more hushed than this room in thorough darkness. In the same way that we estimate silence by contrast with the nearest possible approach to it in sound, do we measure darkness by a similar comparison with light. This Milton felt when he said,

"No light, but rather *darkness visible;*"

which could not be, except for some presence of light, like that which Spenser, impressed with the same feeling, calls

"A little *glooming light, much like a shade.*"

There is a passage also in Thompson (who had a very nice ear) which is in point. You will see how he changes from the roughness of the *r* to the smooth glide of the *s*.

"At last, the roused-up river pours along:
Resistless, roaring, dreadful, down it comes,
From the rude mountain and the mossy wild,
Tumbling through rocks abrupt, and sounding far;
Then o'er the sanded valley floating spreads,
Calm, sluggish, silent."

So, likewise, in the first four stanzas of Collins's most delicious "Ode to Evening," an ode impregnated with deep calm, and the verses of which seem like the arches of some deserted cloister, each growing silenter as you enter farther into their dim seclusion. I could easily cite passages from Shakspeare and Spenser, to show that they well understood this secret. In the word "rustle," and others of the same kind, the *s* is full of meaning. Hawthorne, who has a right in any gathering of poets, will give me an example. It is from his wonderful "Hollow of the Three Hills."

"Before them went the priest, reading the burial-service, while the leaves of his book were *rustling* in the breeze."

The expression of the passage suffers by its being torn away from its context. An air of silence pervades the whole. It is this property of the letter *s* to give a feeling of stillness, or of such faint sounds as would be heard only when everything else is hushed, that takes away all force from words like "dissonance," which Milton sometimes introduces, as I think, unwisely, — as in this passage from "Comus":

"The wonted roar was up amongst the woods,
And filled the air with barbarous *dissonance*,"

where it does not at all harmonize with the immediately preceding "roar."

After all, it seems to me that there is no European

language so rich in words that echo the sense and feeling as the English. The modern French assume a great license in inventing words of this kind, but their newness and want of previous association rob them of much of their force. We, it is true, have cheated the *r* of half its dignity; but in the Italian, where it is indulged and petted, it often disturbs much better company with its licensed brabblings.

There is no deeper study than this of words; and I have found in many an otherwise dull and muddy old folio the amplest repayment, when I have met in it a single hint to the clearer understanding of this mystery. What book are you searching the shelves for?

JOHN.

Gray's Letters. There is a passage in one of them on the subject of the resurrection of old words, which is to the point. I suppose I must allow the authority of so classical a writer, though it tell against the opinion I expressed in the first part of to-day's conversation. Here it is:

"Our poetry has a language peculiar to itself; to which almost every one that has written has added something by enriching it with foreign idioms and derivatives, nay, sometimes words of their own composition or invention. Shakspeare and Milton have been great creators this way; and no one more licentious than Pope or Dryden, who perpetually borrow from the former. . . . Our language, not being a settled thing (like the French), has an undoubted right to words of an hundred years old, provided antiquity have not rendered them unintelligible. In

truth, Shakspeare's language is one of his principal beauties, and he has no less advantage over your Addisons and Rowes in this, than in those other great excellences you mention." [1]

PHILIP.

Had Gray been as untrammelled in his poetry as in his prose, he would have been as delightful as Goldsmith. Well, we have, as usual when we come together, talked a little about everything. We should have hardly pleased Pythagoras, who enjoined a five-years' silence, and whose disciples, as Athenæus relates, were wont to hold fishes in high esteem for their taciturnity.

"To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new."

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[1] Letter LII., to Mr. West.

SECOND CONVERSATION.

THE OLD DRAMATISTS.

JOHN.

I BELIEVE it was Dr. Johnson (surely it was no poet) who first said that all good poetry could be translated into as good prose. It is plain that he saw no distinction between the two except in the metre and rhyme. I should judge so, at least, from his own verses.

PHILIP.

He meant that all poetry must be translatable into "common sense," that popular altar upon whose horns dulness and prejudice are so ready to cling. But how is Pegasus better than a dray-horse with this market-cart trundling behind him? Doubtless some of the truest poetry has been written without either rhyme or metre; but it has lacked one of its highest adornments and one which the most poetical thoughts demand. Metre and rhyme are wings to the artist and crutches to the artificer; they may lift the one to a more empyreal vantage-ground, but they will only change the natural gait of the other for a hobble. The grandest and most noble part of poetry is independent of them. Yet, wanting these, a poem will want the completeness of its effect. I believe

both of them to be the instinctive desires of the most amply poetical spirits. I could cite many poems which would be nothing without them, yet which have the blessed power to lead my heart into the cool stillness of memory or to the breezy headlands of hope.

JOHN.

Prose may do the same.

PHILIP.

Ay, but not so cheaply and simply. It is a great gift to be able to conceive and express those thoughts which entice us out of the actual into the ideal; a yet greater one to utter such as teach us to unite the two; but surely that is the greatest gift of all which superadds to these a keener and more refined delight. There are moods, too, in which pleasurable emotion is all that the mind is capable of, and the power of bestowing this merely is not to be contemned. Beauty is always use. The acanthus leaves of the capital do not help the pillar as a support, and yet I think that even the iconoclastic hammer of strictest utilitarianism might consistently spare them. There are passages in Milton's prose which fall below his poetry only for want of the majestic grace of his metre. They make life seem fairer to me, they give my heart a manlier brace; but I am conscious of a barrenness in them which I had never known, perhaps, had he not himself betrayed it to me by that more lavish splendor of his verse ever changeful, ever

new, pavilioning his thoughts like the cloud arches of a sunset.

JOHN.

If Swift were right when he called him the greatest benefactor of mankind who made two blades of grass grow where one grew before, I would give no mean place to the bestower of a new flower. Whatever has given the spirit a fresh delight has established for itself a fair title in fee simple to the room it has taken up on our planet. Your business to-day is to prove the title of the Old Dramatists.

PHILIP.

Those are the greatest poets who have expressed the largest number of our common thoughts concisely and portably. By conciseness I would not be understood to mean a Spartan and niggardly brevity, or that tight-laced affectation which puts a full stop in place of a comma and makes expression pant and breathe short. If we tie a bundle too tightly our packthread is apt to break, and we lose our pains. Feeling and diction soon lose their healthy color when they are imprisoned together in too narrow a cell. That style is the most concise which expresses a thought best, whether it be in few or many words. A painter would choose a larger canvas, and charge his palette with richer and more varied colors, to paint a sunset than to paint a mouse; yet the one would be as truly concise as the other. Simplicity is neither plain nor bald.

JOHN.

No. A ray of light seems simple enough, and yet is made up of all the primary colors.

PHILIP.

And light is the symbol of truth. As every substance absorbs that part of the pure ray which its nature and constitution desire, and becomes colored accordingly, so is it with language. Every word has a hue of its own which is its meaning, and a just combination of these, whether more or fewer, reproduces that whole of which each is a part, and the general effect is *light*. The same is true of ideas; and every man is more or less a poet in proportion as he has an instinctive understanding of this beautiful and harmonious chromatic chord. To refine a little farther, it is also equally true of the *sound* of words. Every one has its proper correlative in color, and may be almost mathematically demonstrated to be in or out of tune.

JOHN.

One would think, then, that a mathematical mind should excel alike in poetry, painting, and music, and that Euclid, had he been so minded, might have combined the excellencies of Shakspeare, Raphael, and Beethoven.

PHILIP.

Not more truly than the prism, in giving us the same colors, can satisfy and conciliate the eye like

the rainbow. I am not sure, however (since the faculty of analysis is so main an element in the mind of the artist), that any one of the great trio you have named might not have made a good mathematician. Chaucer, when in prison, wrote a treatise on the astrolabe for his son. Pythagoras, who seems to have had a truly poetical nature, made discoveries in the science of numbers; Goethe, in colors, in botany, and in anatomy; and Coleridge tells us that Davy, if he had not chosen to be a great chemist, would have been a great poet. But analysis must be a subordinate faculty or the man instead of being an artist becomes an imitator, using the same means which others have employed, mathematically rather than instinctively.

JOHN.

This harmony between sound and color and (you would add) thought is a very enticing one for speculation. I had often noticed that particular musical notes gave me a sensation of colors, and was wont to apply it to some action of the associative principle too fine for me to trace the links, till I reflected that neither the organ of smell (which has the most powerful effect on our association with places) nor that of taste was at all excited. When I afterwards found that there was a fixed law in the matter I was, for a time, in an ecstasy. I could now understand why it was that certain pieces of music, though there were no discords in the performance of them, were yet very unpleasing to me. The want of harmony was between the different parts. It was as

if, in a large picture, the painter should have had the colors of each figure, or of each group, in tune, and yet, failing to keep the other groups in proper harmony, should make his whole canvas jar upon the eye. I remember being very much interested in a book upon the theory of colors, in which was a diagram of the musical chromatic scale. The illustrations were drawn from our English poets, especially Shakspeare, who was shown never to have struck a false note. Truly, as Falstaff says, "this *instinct* is a great matter." Many of the great painters have been also musicians. Raphael and Gerard Douw have painted themselves in this character. Musical concerts were a favorite subject of Correggio's pencil. Gainsborough was as passionately fond of his *viol da gamba* as of his paints and brushes; and you would probably say that it was the same quality of mind that made him a great painter which, possessed in a more limited degree, made his younger brother a distinguished mechanician. Benvenuto Cellini, I think, mentions Michel Angelo's love of music, and was himself no mean performer. Salvator Rosa must have had a sensitive ear, or he would never have been so expert an *improvvisatore*. Doubtless a book of reference would furnish us with many more examples. Allston was as fond of hearing the rich voice of his niece as Luther was of his son John's. Page has a delicate appreciation of the finest music; and I know one, of whose genius as a sculptor I feel well assured,[1] who is a proficient in the science. The

[1] W. W. Story, who if he keeps the promise of the first bust he has exhibited may soon write himself *artis magister*.

fondness of the painters for St. Cecilia, too, should not be forgotten. Fuseli understood the chromatic force of words as well as of colors, and has left, perhaps, the best descriptive criticism on pictures which we have. Allston's forthcoming volume of lectures will, I doubt not, prove him also a master of the effects of language. Nor have the poets shown less fondness for the sister art. Homer several times has a kind word for the singers. In the eighth book of the "Odyssey," for instance,

> "*πᾶσι γαρ ἀνθρώποισιν ἐπιχθονίοισιν, ἀοιδοὶ*
> *τιμῆς ἔμμοροί εἰσι καὶ αἰδοῦς.*"

But this may be professional. Shakspeare betrays it often. Milton played upon the organ, a congenial instrument. Izaak Walton has recorded Herbert's musical prospensity and skill, and Cowper himself tells of his own fondness for Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord. Goldsmith's flute played the interpreter for him, and paid his way through France. Collins, one of our richest colorists, was passionately fond of music. Now that I have indulged in this refinement of fancy so far, why might I not carry it a step farther, and at once admit form as well as color into this musical party?

PHILIP.

You have unconsciously done so already, by your allusions to sculptors. Vitruvius tells us that architects should know something of music, and you remember Madame De Staël's celebrated fancy. If

I knew enough of music I might, perhaps, find nice analogies between its styles and those of architecture. Dwight, who has at once so profound and refined a perception in whatever relates to music, could trace them for us with enthusiastic demonstration. The parallel between some of the architectural and the poetical styles has often struck me. The Grecian corresponds to the Epic, in its severe majesty, its regular columns, and its images, calm and large like those of gods.

JOHN.

I see that Milton has usurped to himself the whole definition of "epic" in your dictionary. Homer's "Iliad," with its rapidly shifting scenes, its alarums and incursions, differs from the "Paradise Lost" as widely as Mozart's music from Handel's. Still farther apart stands the picturesque and romantic "Odyssey," with its Calypso and Circe, its Lotophagi and Lestrygons and Cyclops, and the homely glimpse of old Argus, which delighted our childhood. The Nibelungen song is more like this. It is quite as much Gothic as Grecian. By the way, I wish that Professor Felton would give us an edition of the "Odyssey" uniform with his "Iliad." I cannot help liking it the better of the two.

PHILIP.

We should never look below the best for a standard, and I shall keep fast hold of Milton still. The Drama, in its highest form, the tragedy, is fitly

symbolled by the Gothic, having its fixed rules, indeed, but admitting of lyrical adornment, and of the quaint corbels of humor, here and there, leering, perhaps, over a tomb, the proper types of Shakspeare's clown. The Lyric, again, may find its parallel among the light and graceful buildings of the Moors.

JOHN.

We have dwelt long enough among these sublimations, almost as impalpable as the Greek poet's "dream of the shadow of a smoke." It is well enough to shape likenesses in the changing outline of a cloud; but if we embrace one, we shall only, like Ixion, beget a monster.

PHILIP.

I believe that you have been seduced from your allegiance solely by that plausible metaphor. But it will betray you in turn; for you have forgotten that one of the nephelid offspring of that Olympian intrigue was the instructor of the greatest heroes of antiquity, nay, of the scientific god of medicine himself. A metaphor, if the correspondence be perfect in all its parts, is one of the safest guides through the labyrinth of truth; but should there chance to be a break in the thread, we are left without a clew in the more inextricable maze into which we have suffered it to lead us. As to our sublimations, I will rebuke you out of the mouth of Sir Thomas Browne, who says, "I love to lose myself in a

mystery; to pursue my reason to an *O Altitudo!*" — to which I heartily assent.

JOHN.

If poetry be not out of place in the train of these (shall I call them philosophical?) refinements, I should be glad to think myself a day's journey nearer to the "golden stronde" of the dramatists.

PHILIP.

You might open them almost anywhere, and find an oracle to your purpose. True poetry is never out of place, nor will a good word spoken for her ever fail of some willing and fruitful ear. Even under our thin crust of fashion and frivolity throb the undying fires of the great soul of man, the fountain and centre of all poetry, and which will one day burst forth to wither like grass-blades the vain temples and palaces which forms and conventionalities have heaped smotheringly upon it. Behind the blank faces of the weak and thoughtless I see, sometimes with a kind of dread, this awful and mysterious presence, as I have seen one of Allston's paintings in a ball-room, overlooking with its serene and steadfast eyes the butterfly throng beneath, and seeming to gaze, from these narrow battlements of time, far out into the infinite promise of the future, beholding there the free, erect, and perfected soul.

JOHN.

Ah, you have climbed upon the saddle of your Pegasus again, and will leave me far behind you.

Mention poetry, or anti-slavery, and you go suddenly mad, though in ordinary matters a reasonable fellow enough. They are as fruitful a text to you as the "Kaim o' Kimprunes" to Mr. Oldbuck. I like your enthusiasm very well, but you sometimes jumble them together oddly enough.

PHILIP.

You forget that I believe the poetical sentiment and what we call the sentiment of natural religion to be identical. Both of them are life-members of the New England Anti-Slavery Society. You are at heart as much an Abolitionist as I; and if you were not, I should suspect the purity of my own principles if they built up a wall between me and my brother. No sincere desire of doing good need make an enemy of a single human being; for that is a capacity in which he is by nature unfitted to shine. It may, and must, rouse opposition; but that philanthropy has surely a flaw in it which cannot sympathize with the oppressor equally as with the oppressed. It is the high and glorious vocation of Poesy as well to make our own daily life and toil more beautiful and holy to us by the divine ministerings of love as to render us swift to convey the same blessing to our brother. Poesy is love's chosen apostle, and the very almoner of God. She is the home of the outcast and the wealth of the needy. For her the hut becomes a palace, whose halls are guarded by the gods of Phidias, and kept peaceful by the maid-mothers of Raphael. She loves better the poor wanderer whose

bare feet know by heart all the freezing stones of the pavement than the delicate maiden for whose dainty soles Brussels and Turkey have been over-careful; and I doubt not but some remembered scrap of childish song hath often been a truer alms than all the benevolent societies could give. She is the best missionary, knowing when she may knock at the door of the most curmudgeonly hearts without being turned away unheard. The omnipresence of her spirit is beautifully and touchingly expressed in "The Poet," one of the divisions of a little volume of poems by Cornelius Mathews. Were the whole book as simple in thought and diction as the most of this particular poem, I know few modern volumes that would equal it. Let me read you the passage I alluded to. You will see that the poor slave is not forgotten.

"There sits not on the wilderness's edge,
In the dusk lodges of the wintry North,
Nor couches in the rice-field's slimy sedge,
Nor on the cold, wide waters ventures forth, —
Who waits not, in the pauses of his toil,
With hope that spirits in the air may sing;
Who upward turns not, at propitious times,
Breathless, his silent features listening,
In desert and in lodge, on marsh and main,
To feed his hungry heart and conquer pain."

JOHN.

Worthy of the fine imagination and the classic taste of Collins; though he would have found fault, I suspect, with the assonance of "sits not" and

"waits not," coming in as they do, also, in the same place in their respective verses. But these are trifles. No man ought to stop, looking for motes in such a beaker of pure Hippocrene as this. These lines express a truth, and, in such utterance, the mind does not linger, daintily picking choice phrase, as it does for the decking out of a fancy. Truth comes huddling forth like molten iron, which, though it be beautified by the little swarms of bee-like sparks which hover around it, yet runs into the nearest channel and there soon hardens, taking the chance shape of its mould.

PHILIP.

Those verses do, indeed, express a truth. The love of the beautiful and true, like the dewdrop in the heart of the crystal, remains forever clear and liquid in the inmost shrine of man's being, though all the rest be turned to stone by sorrow and degradation. The angel who has once come down into the soul will not be driven thence by any sin or baseness even, much less by any undeserved oppression or wrong. At the soul's gate sits she silently, with folded hands and downcast eyes; but at the least touch of nobleness those patient orbs are serenely uplifted, and the whole spirit is lightened with their prayerful lustre. Over all life broods Poesy, like the calm, blue sky with its motherly, rebuking face. She is the true preacher of the Word, and when in time of danger and trouble the established shepherds have cast down their crooks

and fled, she tenderly careth for the flock. On her calm and fearless heart rests weary freedom, when all the world have driven her from the door with scoffs and mockings. From her white breasts flows the strong milk which nurses our heroes and martyrs; and she blunts the sharp tooth of the fire, makes the axe edgeless, and dignifies the pillory or the gallows. She is the great reformer, and where the love of her is strong and healthy, wickedness and wrong cannot long prevail. The more this love is cultivated and refined, the more do men strive to make their outward lives rhythmical and harmonious, that they may accord with that inward and dominant rhythm by whose key the composition of all noble and worthy deeds is guided. To make one object, in outward or inward nature, more holy to a single heart is reward enough for a life; for the more sympathies we gain or awaken for what is beautiful, by so much deeper will be our sympathy for that which is most beautiful, — the human soul. Love never contracts its circles; they widen by as fixed and sure a law as those around a pebble cast into still water. The angel of love, when, full of sorrow, he followed the first exiles, behind whom the gates of Paradise shut with that mournful clang, of which some faint echo has lingered in the hearts of all their offspring, unwittingly snapped off and brought away in his hand the seed-pod of one of the never-fading flowers which grew there. Into all dreary and desolate places fell some of its blessed kernels; they asked but little soil to root themselves in, and in this

narrow patch of our poor clay they sprang most quickly and sturdily. Gladly they grew, and from them all time has been sown with whatever gives a higher hope to the soul, or makes life nobler and more godlike; while from the overarching sky of poesy, sweet dew forever falls, to nurse and keep them green and fresh from the world's dust.

JOHN.

If a drop or two from the phial of my unassisted reason — which you, I fear, would leave in some dark corner upon the shelf, while you are playing off your experiments with the brighter-hued fluids of the laboratory — be competent to precipitate the theory which you have dissolved in so splendid a commixture, I should guess that your notion of the good influence of poetry amounts simply to this, — that it maintains the sway of the heart over the intellect. The intellect has only one failing, which, to be sure, is a very considerable one; it has no conscience. Napoleon is the readiest instance of this. If his heart had borne any proportion to his brain he had been one of the greatest men in all history. As it is, his triumphs are of the intellect merely, which memory, indeed, may wonder at, but will never love. He will go down to posterity as a deformity; like one of those hideous caricatures in plaster, of which his countrymen are so fond (a noticeable fact, by the way, and illustrative of national character), whose chief characteristic is a monstrous head out of all proportion to the other members. That athletic

intellect, its huge muscles hardened and tutored by long training, and grim with the proud dust of unnumbered victories in the wrestling-ring, became weak as a child in the gripe of the sturdy, honest *heart* of England. Whatever magnanimity he has shown has in it an ugly, corrupting spot of forethought, and seems rather the result of intention than of instinct; as if he were constraining himself into a heroic attitude, to be modelled in a statue for posterity. The intellect can never be great, save in pupilage to the heart. Nay, it can never be truly strong but so. It suspects and mistrusts itself at every turn, and gives way ignominiously at last. Its sole lust is for power, won it matters not how, and of whatever kind or degree. And it cheats itself, too, fancying its straw a spear like a weaver's beam, and strutting ridiculous with its twig sceptre and paper crown. It is because politics have been regarded as an intellectual science that they have become so proverbially dishonest. The politicians juggle on, buying power at any rate, till the great lubberly national conscience, which their buzzings have lulled asleep, wakens with a portentous yawn, and brushes the whole infesting swarm into blank oblivion. Could we but find a statesman with a poet's eye! Burke had but a narrow miss of it. It is only the intellect that can be thoroughly and hideously wicked. It can forget everything in the attainment of its ends. The heart recoils; in its retired places some drops of childhood's dew still linger, defying manhood's fiery noon; it remembers;

it forecasts; it dares not leap the black chasm of the life to come. The intellect is haunted in its lonely moments by its weird sisters, whose promises of sway entice it on from one foul deed to another. What an intellect was Napoleon's! He was the Goethe of the throne and the camp. And that huge structure which he piled with such wasteful pains was but like the winter palaces of the Czar, being reared by the intellect alone, of its icy blocks, crystal, far-shining, yet no match for the silent eye of that all-beholding sun of mankind's moral sense. What pang of the world's sore-distressed heart did he make the lighter? What gleam of sunshine streamed into the dim hovel of our race the more freely and bounteously for him? The great intellect dies with its possessor; the great heart, though his name in whose breast it had its ebb and flow be buried in the mouldered past, survives forever, beckoning kindred natures to deeds of heroic trust and self-sacrifice. Is Luther dead while Garrison still lives? The intellect would fain bargain with and outwit the future; the heart buys acceptance of it with a simple smile. This, then, is the great errand of the poet; to keep alive our fealty to the heart, and, even when it has been banished by the usurping intellect, to rouse our loyalty with the despised, and therefore unmolested, persuasion of a song

PHILIP.

What you say is true. The intellect, so it be at work, cares not much for what end. It is forever

moulding with its restless fingers the clay within its reach, and shapes with almost equal pleasure an Apollo or a Priapus. But they err who assert that what we humanly call great must of need be virtuous. For the intellect may seduce the heart, and so, even by wicked means, create something that shall last. This was the case with Voltaire, whose omnipotent sneer, evil in itself, did good as well as evil. To me one of the most interesting relics of Napoleon is that table-talk of his in his island jail. A kind of Coleridge-Machiavel, he says something noticeable about everything, scrawling the aphoristic commentaries of a general with the cramped precision of an orderly-sergeant. Well, a conversation is like a Classical Dictionary, where, at the end of every subject, a *vide* directs you to some other, till you might as well attempt to read Hesiod's stupid "Theogony." Let us come back to our old Dramatists.

JOHN.

The Old English Dramatists! with what a vague feeling of pride and reverence do I utter those four words! Entering the enchanted, and to me almost untravelled, realm which they "rule as their demesne," I feel like the awestruck Goth when his eyes drooped beneath the reverend aspects of the Roman Senate, and he concluded them an assembly of gods; or more like him who, in searching the windings of a cavern, came suddenly upon King Arthur and his knights, seated, as of yore, about the renowned round-table. Silent and severe they sit,

those men of the old fearless time, and gaze with stern eyes upon the womanly newcomer whose limbs have never been galled by the weary harness, and whose soft arm has never held the lance in rest.

PHILIP.

Yes; we feel when we come among them as if their joys and sorrows were on a more Titanic scale than those of our day. It seems as if we had never suffered and never acted, and yet we feel a noble spur and willingness to endure and to do. They show us the dignity and strength of the soul, and, after reading them, the men we see in the streets look nobler and more manlike, and we find more brotherhood in their before unanswering faces. Their works stand among those of the moderns like the temples and altars of the ancient dwellers on this continent among the rude hovels of a race of descendants ignorant of their use and origin. Let us muse awhile in this city of the past and sketch roughly some of the mighty monuments yet standing therein.

JOHN.

It is a little strange that the English, all of whose glorious past belongs equally to us, should pity us for having no antiquity to look back upon, as if that, even were it true, would preclude us from having poets. Besides sharing their own history and tradition with them we can also claim our share in the ancientry of this our adopted hemisphere and point to monuments set by which their idle Druid stones

are but things of an hour ago. Not that the poet needs such obscurities to grope in or desires a greater antiquity than that of his own heart, in which are written the same wondrous oracles, uncertain, yet not past finding out, of which all his brethren from Eden downward have deciphered but a few lines. Wherever Shakspeare lays his plots that ruddy English heart of his was the true meridian whence the degrees of latitude and longitude were numbered. Paradise and pandemonium both found room enough with Milton in that little house in the Artillery Walk. The poet who leans upon the crumbling arm of Eld will never himself become a part of history. When he crossed the threshold of his own heart he left his strength behind him; and in proportion as he wanders farther thence he becomes remote from the hearts of all his kind; his words become a dim murmur with no articulate syllable to claim attention from the ear. But I interrupt.

PHILIP.

You interrupt well. In the old dramatists there is the beauty of health, strength, and invincible sincerity. Sorrow there is, as there is in life; but it is a sorrow that sympathizes with every human being, and is too genuine to be warped into a selfish and gloomy misanthropy. They wrote before the good English word "feeling" had whined itself into the French one, "sentiment." They were too hardy to need to shelter themselves in the soft cloak of sentimentalism and thought it a worthier and more poetical ambition to emulate the angels in love than the

devils in scorn and hate. Byronism would have stood with numbed limbs and chattering teeth in the sharp, bracing mountain air in which alone their lungs could find free play. Yet there amid the bare, majestic rocks bloom tender Alpine flowers of delicatest hue and rarest fragrance, and the sturdy moss creeps everywhere with its heartfelt green which, even in cloudy weather, looks as if it had garnered up in itself a store of sunshine.

I shall make my first selections from George Chapman, author of the best translation of Homer, and the friend of Spenser, Shakspeare, Marlow, and other great spirits of his day. I shall read to you only those passages which have pleased me the most heartily, leaving you to suppose at the same time that I leave unread a thousand as good which do not happen to fit my humor as well. I shall punctuate and emphasize, and even change a syllable, or the order in which it stands, to please my own judgment and ear.

JOHN.

I like your declaration of independence, for I have generally found, when my reading has led me that way, that the labors of editors and commentators were like the wind Cecias, whose quality it was, according to Aristotle, to gather clouds rather than to dispel them.

PHILIP.

Chapman is a very irregular writer. I might liken him to a hoodwinked eagle, which sometimes, led by an ungovernable prompting of instinctive free-

dom, soars far up into the clear ether of song and floats majestical on level wings where this world, with all its fret and turmoil, shows in the blue distance only as a silent star, and which as suddenly will dash down again and almost stun himself against the noisy and dusty earth. This is very natural in one of so impulsive a temperament. His impetuosity is continually bursting out in hot jets like little geysers, which often carry the mud and stones along with them toward heaven. So eager is he to give vent to a favorite thought or image that he does not heed sufficiently the intermediate steps, plunging along through mud and brambles till he reach his object. He has little dramatic power, that mesmerism by which Shakspeare makes his characters speak and act his own thoughts without letting his own individuality appear in the matter, and his plays, taken as wholes, are not very interesting; but they abound in grand lines and images full of an antique and majestic port. In didactic and moral passages he comes nearer to Shakspeare than does any one of his contemporaries.

JOHN.

I think I have seen Chapman somewhere charged with bombast, and with some show of truth, if I may trust some passages quoted.

PHILIP.

The accusation was probably laid by some critic who could pardon nothing which rose above the dead marsh level of Pope. He is rugged enough

sometimes, but seldom turgid. When his mind has once taken a turn in any direction it receives tributary streams and runnels from every side till it foams and rushes along with the turbulent force of a swollen river. There are some minds to which all true poetry seems inflated; commonwealths from which poets are excluded without the artificial help of a Platonic edict. The mass of men are so fallen from a true state of nature that whatever would fain recall them to it or presupposes it seems ridiculous and unnatural. Read Milton aloud on the Exchange and you would be laughed at, as much for what you read as for reading at all. The multitude take the expression of something they have never felt for an absurdity or an affectation, or worse. So it is if they hear anything which strokes their prejudices the wrong way. When the King of Denmark sent missionaries to convert the Malabarians the Brahmins expressed their entire satisfaction with the principles of the Christian religion except inasmuch as it allowed its believers to eat cow's flesh and to spit. An intelligent Turk who should come to this country with our Declaration of Independence in his head would be delighted and surprised to find that a man may carry out in his practice almost any doctrine save the main one which that instrument inculcates, without any fear of Autocrat Mob. He may preach despotism and be respectable, Mahometanism and he would be run after; but if he preach Abolitionism he loses caste at once. To us, on the other hand this seems highly natural and proper.

JOHN.

God's livery is a very plain one, but its wearers have good reason to be content. If it have not so much gold lace about it as Satan's it keeps out foul weather better and is besides a great deal cheaper. I do not think that you do Pope justice. His translation of Homer is as bad as it can be, I admit, but surely you cannot deny the merit of lively and ingenious fancy to his "Rape of the Lock," nor of knowledge of life and a certain polished classicalness to his Epistles and Satires. His portraits are like those of Copley, of fine gentlemen and ladies, whose silks and satins are the best part of them.

PHILIP.

I cannot allow the parallel. In Copley's best pictures the drapery, though you may almost hear it rustle, is wholly a subordinate matter. Witness some of those in our college-hall here at Cambridge, that of Madame Boylston especially. I remember being once much struck with the remark of a friend who convinced me of the fact that Copley avoided the painting of wigs whenever he could, thus getting a step nearer nature. Pope would have made them a prominent object. I grant what you say about the "Rape of the Lock;" but this does not prove that Pope was a poet. If you wish an instance of a *poet's* fancy, look into the "Midsummer Night's Dream." I can allow that Pope has written what is entertaining, but surely

not poetical. Show me a line that makes you love God and your neighbor better, that inclines you to meekness, charity, and forbearance, and I will show you a hundred that make it easier for you to be the odious reverse of all these. In many a pagan poet there is more Christianity. No poet could write a "Dunciad," or even read it. You have persuaded yourself into thinking Pope a poet, as in looking for a long time at a stick which we believe to be an animal of some kind, we fancy that it is stirring. His letters are amusing, but do not increase one's respect for him. When you speak of his being classical, I am sure that you jest. Your favorite, Collins, is a truly classical writer. For classicalness does not consist in any amount of Latin and Greek, nor in a body-snatching of dead forms of expression or belief. It is only the plain simplicity of a gentleman. A scholarly air of quiet and repose, an easy dignity, and an unstrained grace pervade it. It may consist with the highest gifts of the imagination, as in the delightful poet I have mentioned. The critics, by a strange kind of metonymy, have applied it chiefly to the curious insipidities of the dull, or the mechanic inspirations of the pedantic. Chapman, though a fine scholar, is in no wise classical. His merriment is quite too boisterous, and his enthusiasm too unrestrained. When we read a classical poet, we feel as if we had entered a marble temple where a cool silence reigns; a few quiet statues gleam around us, pure and naked; a few short

inscriptions tell of the deeds of heroes; all is calm, grand, and simple to the highest perfection of art. But if Chapman be not classical, he has the higher merit of earnestness, sincerity, and rugged heartiness, not without some touches, here and there, of graceful tenderness and fierce sublimity. Now let me read to you the opening of "Bussy D'Ambois," a tragedy:

"*Enter* BUSSY D'AMBOIS *in mean apparel.*

"Fortune, not reason, rules the state of things:
Reward goes backward, honor on his head;
Who is not poor is monstrous; only need
Gives form and worth to every human seed.
As cedars beaten with continual storms,
So great men flourish; and do imitate
Unskilful statuaries, who suppose
(In forming a Colossus) if they make him
Straddle enough, strut, and look big and gape,
Their work is goodly: so men merely great
In their affected gravity of voice,
Sourness of countenance, manners, cruelty,
Authority, wealth, and all the spawn of fortune,
Think they bear all the kingdom's worth before them;
Yet differ not from those Colossic statues,
Which, with heroic forms without o'erspread,
Within are naught but mortar, flint, and lead.
Man is a torch borne in the wind; a dream
But of a shadow, summed with all his substance;
And, as great seamen, using all their wealth
And skills in Neptune's deep, invisible paths,
In tall ships richly built and ribbed with brass,
To put a girdle round about the world, —

When they have done it, coming near their haven,
Are fain to give a warning-piece, and call
A poor, stayed fisherman, that never passed
His country's sight, to waft and guide them in ; —
So, when we wander farthest through the waves
Of glassy glory and the gulfs of state,
Topped with all titles, spreading all our reaches,
As if each private arm would sphere the earth,
We must to virtue for her guide resort,
Or we shall shipwreck in our safest port."

JOHN.

I can hardly persuade myself that the grand metaphor of the torch did not come from Hebrew lips. I know no other image that would so well express the fickleness and uncertainty of our hold on life as this. The likening of virtue, too, to the poor, stayed fisherman that had never been out of his country's sight, is very sweet. With the first part of the passage you read I was rather disappointed. But the last made up for all.

PHILIP.

I read it that the contrast might be the greater, and also to give you a specimen of his language. He does not, you see, pick his words much. He was in haste to get to the last half of the soliloquy, where he had something to say that pleased him better. You will find that he himself resembles those "unskilful statuaries" not a little sometimes. The length, and intricacy even, of the last comparison in what I read pleases me, perhaps

from its putting me in mind so much of the golden-mouthed Jeremy Taylor. But Taylor always begins his similes with a "so have I seen," which gives great liveliness and force to them.

JOHN.

Do you remember one?

PHILIP.

Many; who that had ever read one could forget it? —

"For so have I seen a lark, rising from his bed of grass and soaring upward, singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven, and climb above the clouds; but the poor bird was beaten back with the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and unconstant, descending more at every breadth of the tempest than he could recover by the libration and frequent weighing of his wings; till the *little creature* was forced to sit down and pant, and stay till the storm was over, *and did rise and sing as if he had learned music and motion of an angel as he passed sometimes through the air about his ministries here below:* so are the prayers of a good man," etc. — "Twenty-five Sermons preached at Golden Grove," Serm. V., p. 60. Edit. 1653.

JOHN.

What a poet's eye and heart and tongue! How lovingly he speaks of the "*poor bird*" and the "*little creature*," and what a soaring melody there is in the ending! Shelley's "Skylark," almost perfect as it is, has not the fluttering rise and the

ecstatic gush of this. No lark ever shook fresher dew from his wings.

PHILIP.

I will give you one more:

"But so have I seen the returning sea enter upon the strand, and the waters, rolling toward the shore, throw up little portions of the tide, and retire, as if nature meant to play, and not to change the abode of waters; but still the floods crept by little steppings, and invaded more by his progressions than he lost by his retreat, and, having told the number of his steps, he possesses his new portion till the Angel calls him back, that he may leave his unfaithful dwelling of the sand: so is the pardon of our sins." — Serm. VIII., p. 97.

I have quoted two of his comparisons to please you; let me quote one passage more to please myself.

"No man knows, but he that loves his children, how many delicious accents make a man's heart dance in the pretty conversation of those dear pledges; their childishness, their stammering, their little angers, their innocences, their imperfections, their necessities, are so many little emanations of joy and comfort to him that delights in their persons and society." — Serm. XVIII., p. 236.

How I love that dingy old folio, with its huge lumps of Greek and Latin, its quaintnesses, its metaphysical refinements, its tender sympathies, and, above all, its radiant piety, and the poetry which springs out of it, goldening the whole! I never can help looking upon Taylor as the last of

that noble line of poets who consecrated the first half of the seventeenth century.

Chapman loves to draw his heroes of a defiant and indomitable spirit, and with a thorough contempt of all fooleries and shams. I suspect that he has unconsciously given us a glimpse of his own nature. In his translation of the "Iliad," he is said to show a great partiality to the rough, straightforward Ajax, and to eke out his speeches, here and there, with a little added fire of his own. Of this spirit here is a specimen. The king's brother, who wishes to gain over to his own interest so brave a man as D'Ambois, finds him lying on the ground, and says to him:

> "Turned to earth, alive?
> Up, man! the sun shines on thee.
> "*D'Ambois.* Let it shine;
> I am no mote to play in 't, as great men are."

So, when D'Ambois is killed, he says proudly that

> "Death and Destiny
> *Come behind D'Ambois*,"

as if even *they* feared to face him. But you will see enough of this in all the passages I shall read to you. No man ever had a larger or nobler idea of the might and grandeur of the human soul than Chapman. He had a great deal of that exulting feeling of strength and self-help which contemporaries endeavor to paralyze by calling it conceit, but which the heart of posterity swells over as the instinct and stamp of

greatness. It is a something which we find in the lives of all great men; a recollection, as it were, of wings, which enables them, in the words of Marvell,

"Remembering still their former height,"

to rise above these lower regions of turmoil into a clearer and serener air. It is a feeling of trustfulness which is needful to those who dare to cast their seed upon these waves of time that it may float down and come to fruitage in eternity, and who gladly put by the harlot blandishments of to-day (so bewitching to small souls), and find their strength and solace in the approving and prophetic eyes of that infinite to-morrow on whose great heart they rest secure,

"Feeling, through all this fleshly dress,
Bright shoots of everlastingness." [1]

JOHN.

Yes, such feelings are the ravens which God sends to feed these prophets in the wilderness of an unrecognizing world; they may seem but unsightly, ill-boding birds to everybody else, but to those whom they sustain they appear gentle as doves. God's messengers always look like shabby fellows to the rest of the world, and often are not recognized, even by those of whom they ask hospitality, till they are gone forever. Entering they seem simple wayfarers; it is only when they look back upon us that we know the angel countenance with a pang of unavailing sorrow.

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[1] Vaughan.

PHILIP.

Chapman seems never so well content as when he makes one of his heroes burst forth in an impetuous (and sometimes muddy) flood of scornful independence, asserting proudly the dignity of genius as overtopping all other dignities whatever. He was, like all his great brethren (the worthy forerunners of the glorious band who set the divine right of all temporal power forever beneath the feet of that diviner right of the eternal soul), ashamed to bend the knee, nay, even to pay common civility to any conventionality, howsoever seemingly venerable and august. Indeed, there is too much scorn and pride in him to consist with the highest genius. For great genius is humble; its confidence is not in its own strength, but in that of its cause. Pride cannot fly over the great void gulf between its performance and its hope; but if she tempt the perilous voyage, flutters her vain wings and drops exhausted into that unfathomable grave. Chapman's independent bearing often breaks down into a mere swagger, and, indeed, is seldom confined within the limits of established propriety. Doubtless he was of opinion with Fuller that "it is better to lap one's pottage like a dog than to eat mannerly with a spoon of the Devil's giving;" and if he be sometimes bent on believing that all spoons, save a clumsy horn one of his own make, are presents from that liberal gentleman and go about laboriously to lap like a dog when he had better have eaten like a Christian (like some who

foolishly think a certain rude ungraciousness of bearing best befitting a radical), yet we should pardon a great deal to a mistaken love of principle, when the principle is a good one, remembering that the flanks of our own hobbies are bloody with our too fiery spurring, and that enthusiasm is the most amiable of excesses.

JOHN.

A long sentence, but safely delivered at last. Those radicals you speak of are the deep-seeing philosophers who believe that an innate democracy resides in cowhide boots, and that a thorough knowledge of government and a general intelligence upon all subjects soak into the brain from the liberal virtue of a roofless hat; who suspect good breeding for a monarchist in disguise; believe that all white men are their brothers on the day before election; and proudly stand sponsors while Mr. Dorr (a man who mistakenly, it is true, but no less surely, would have stabbed true democracy to the heart by appealing to brute force) is christened over again with the abused name of Algernon Sydney. And yet such men as these play off the puppet show of our government; such men as these persuade the workingmen of our dear New England to rivet the chains upon three millions of their fellow-workers and so drug their senses with idle flatteries as to make them forget that while the laborer is bought and sold in one part of the country he can never be truly respected in the other. I can hardly keep my tears down when I think of it.

PHILIP.

Who goes mad now? But I do not wonder. I said that Chapman has little dramatic power. His plays seem rather to be soliloquies spoken by himself from behind the mask of different characters than true dramas. Yet he has considerable knowledge of character, and shrewd remarks and little natural touches are not infrequent in his plays. Here is an instance of the last. Tamyra, who is secretly in love with D'Ambois, after a speech of his says, — fearful lest her calling him by name might betray her secret, and yet unable to let slip a chance of saying something in his praise, —

"Methinks *the man* hath answered for us well."

The king's brother, who suspects the truth, turns to her and asks,

"The man? Why, Madam, d' ye not know his name?"

She answers nobly enough,

"Man is a name of honor for a king;
Additions take away from each chief thing."

JOHN.

Yes, she covers her retreat with a true woman's skill, not allowing that she knows D'Ambois, and yet satisfying her love by construing the epithet she had applied to him into so jealous a tribute of praise as would be content with no place lower than the highest.

PHILIP.

Something of Beaumont and Fletcher's comes to my mind in illustration:

"I watched how fearfully,
And yet how suddenly, he cured his lies;
The right wit of a woman."

I shall now go on reading extracts from the rest of this play and from others, without following the plot or any other order than chance or fancy may dictate. Indeed, Chapman's plots are of little importance to him except as threads for his thoughts to crystallize around. Here are one or two specimens of his exalted notion of greatness and of the noble vigor and stateliness which animate and expand his verse in the expression of it:

"His words and looks
Are like the flashes and the bolts of Jove;
His deeds inimitable, like the sea
Which shuts still as it opes, and leaves no tracks
Nor prints of precedent for mean men's acts."

D'Ambois.

JOHN.

Grand, and grandly spoken.

PHILIP.

The following is even finer, or at least shows more art in expression:

"His great heart will not down: 't is like the sea,
That, partly by his own internal heat,
Partly the stars' daily and nightly motion,

Their heat and light, and partly by the place
O' th' divers frames, but chiefly by the moon,
Bristled with surges, — never will be won
(No, not when the hearts of all those powers are burst)
To make retreat into his settled home,
Till he be crowned with his own quiet foam."

D'Ambois.

JOHN.

If a poet is fond of the sea, it always prepossesses me in his favor. The third verse of what you have read has great delicacy and beauty of expression:

" Partly the stars' daily and nightly motion: "

there is a waviness in its flow, and, at the same time, a gliding melody, which suggests both the stars and the ocean. The ending is exquisite; the whole sentence seems to swell on and on, like a wave upon the beach, till it breaks into the quiet foam of the last verse, and slides gently to its rippling close.

PHILIP.

Chapman does not often linger to describe outward nature; he has more important matters at heart. His natural scenery is of the soul, and that mostly of an Alpine character. There is none of that breezy, summer-like feeling in him which pervaded the verses of the lyric poets a short time after, and has come near to perfection in many descriptive pieces of our own day,

" Annihilating all that 's made,
To a green thought in a green shade,"

and seeming to be translations from the grasshopper, butterfly, locust, bird, and bee languages into the vernacular. Yet he has some passages of great merit in this kind, and which show a very genial eye and ear.

JOHN.

Whose is that couplet you just quoted?

PHILIP.

Andrew Marvell's, the generous friend of Milton, the kind-hearted satirist, the brave lover and defender of freedom, whose commendatory verses, you remember, are prefixed to "Paradise Lost." He had a rare vein of poetry in him, delicate, yet vigorously healthy. I know no poet who had a greater love of nature, or has poured it forth more sweetly. There is a description of grass by him, in a poem addressed to Lord Fairfax, which is full of the ripest fancy and feeling:

"And now to the abyss I pass
Of that *unfathomable* grass,
Where men like grasshoppers appear,
But grasshoppers are giants there;
They in their squeaking laugh, contemn
Us, as we walk more low than them,
And from *the precipices tall*
Of the green spires to us do call.
To see men through this meadow dive,
We wonder how they rise alive;
. . . . . .
But, as the mariners who sound,
And show upon their lead the ground,

They bring up flowers, so to be seen
And prove they 've at the bottom been.
No scene that turns with engines strange
Doth oftener than these meadows change ;
For, when the sun the grass hath vext,
The tawny mowers enter next,
Who seem like Israelites to be,
Walking on foot through a green sea :
To them the grassy deeps divide
And crowd, a lane on either side ;
With *whistling scythe*, and elbow strong,
These massacre the grass along."

We cannot pardon extravagance in the imagination ; but Fancy would be tame without it, and can never assume her proper nature of joyousness, except she break into it. I know you will thank me if I read a little more.

"Thus I, easy philosopher,
Among the birds and trees confer ;
And little now to make me wants
Or of the fowls, or of the plants ;
Give me but wings as they, and I
Straight floating on the air shall fly ;
Or turn me but, and you shall see
I was but an inverted tree.
Already I begin to call
In their most learned original ;
And, where I language want, my signs
The bird upon the bough divines,
And more attentive there doth sit,
Than if she were with lime-twigs knit.
No leaf doth tremble in the wind,

Which I, returning, cannot find:
Out of these scattered Sybil's-leaves,
Strange prophecies my fancy weaves;
. . . . . .
What Rome, Greece, Palestine, e'er said,
I in this light mosaic read.
. . . . . .
The oak-leaves me embroider all,
Between which caterpillars crawl,
And ivy, with familiar trails,
Me licks and clasps, and curls and hales.
Under this Attic cope, I move
Like some great prelate of the grove;
Then, languishing with ease, I toss
On pallets swollen of velvet moss,
While the wind, cooling through the boughs,
Flatters with air my panting brows.
. . . . . .
How safe, methinks, and strong, behind
These trees, I have encamped my mind;
Where beauty, aiming at the heart,
Bends in some tree its useless dart;
And where the world no certain shot
Can make, or me it toucheth not!"

Old Walton would have clapped his hands at this next:

"No serpent new, nor crocodile,
Remains behind our little Nile,
Unless itself you will mistake,
Among these meads the only snake.
See in what wanton, harmless folds
It everywhere the meadow holds;

And its yet muddy back doth lick,
Till as a crystal mirror slick,
Where all things gaze themselves, and doubt
If they be in it or without;
And, for his shade which therein shines.
Narcissus-like, the sun, too, pines.
O, what a pleasure 't is to hedge
My temples here with heavy sedge,
Abandoning my lazy side,
Stretched as a bank unto the tide;
Or to suspend my *sliding foot*
On the osier's *undetermined root,*
And in its branches tough to hang,
While at my lines the fishes twang!"

Thomson's Marvell, Vol. III., p. 217.

Now take one little turn with me in his "Garden," and we will come back to Chapman.

"Fair Quiet, have I found thee here,
And Innocence, thy sister dear?
Mistaken long, I sought you then
In busy companies of men.
Your sacred plants, if here below,
Only among the plants will grow;
Society is all but rude
To this delicious solitude.

. . . . .

"What wondrous life is this I lead!
Ripe apples drop about my head;
The luscious clusters of the vine
Upon my mouth do crush their wine;
The nectarine and curious peach
Into my hands themselves do reach;

Stumbling on melons, as I pass,
Insnared with flowers, I fall on grass.

"Meanwhile, the mind, from pleasure less,
Withdraws into its happiness;
The mind, that ocean where each kind
Doth straight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other worlds and other seas,
Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade.

"Here, at the fountain's sliding foot,
Or at some fruit-tree's mossy root,
Casting the body's vest aside,
My soul into the boughs doth glide;
There, like a bird, it sits and sings,
Then whets and claps its silver wings,
And, till prepared for longer flight,
Waves in its plumes the various light.

. . . . .

"How well the skilful gardener drew,
Of flowers and herbs, this dial new!
Where, from above, the milder sun
Doth through a fragrant zodiac run;
And, as it works, the industrious bee
Computes its time as well as we.
How could such sweet and wholesome hours
Be reckoned but with herbs and flowers?"

Thomson's Marvell, Vol. III., p. 412.

JOHN.

If Milton had written these, we should almost have set them above the "Allegro" and "Pense-

roso." Cowley's "Grasshopper," and Emerson's "Humblebee," must yield to their luxuriant fancy, their delicate philosophy, and their fresh aptness of expression. They make a summer all around us in this bare December weather; the roses bloom and the blossoms open their startled eyes upon the bleak twigs as in Cornelius Agrippa's *opus magnum* of necromancy. And then how coolly and silently and fragrantly sweet images and calming thoughts drop wavering down, one after another, upon the heart, like a snow of blossoms from an overladen bough, making us feel better, and, if gentleness be wise, wiser too! — I have no doubt that these verses were written in winter. The imagination is more select than the eye, and we describe things best when they are absent. The eye is puzzled and confounded with the presence of a beautiful object, and is willing to relapse from an analyzing attention into a vague delight. After the object is withdrawn, the imagination does not recreate, but chooses and arranges from the distinctest images of the memory; and this result, presented again to the eye, is more clear and satisfying than the original vision.

PHILIP.

I am afraid that Chapman's landscapes will look tame and leaden to you, now that your eye has been put out of tune by such brilliant colors. The following verses make one feel as if he had suddenly thrown up the window of a close and dazzling room, and gazed out into the dim, foreboding eyes of Night.

Tamyra is expecting D'Ambois, whom she loves unlawfully, at midnight.

"*Now all ye peaceful regents of the night,*
Silently-gliding exhalations,
Languishing winds, and murmuring falls of waters,
Sadness of heart, and ominous secureness,
Enchantments, dead sleeps, all the friends of rest,
That ever wrought upon the life of man,
Extend your utmost strengths, and this charmed hour
Fix like the centre ; make the violent wheels
Of Time and Fortune stand ; and great existence
(The Maker's treasury) now not seem to be
To all but my approaching friends and me."

You cannot fail to be struck with the sadness and silence infused into the first five verses by that peculiar property of the letter *s* which we were speaking of.

JOHN.

It seems to me the perfection of descriptive poetry ; painting, not the objects themselves, but their effect upon the mind reflected back upon them and giving them a color of its own. An unhappy man, if he go into a wood, shall hear nothing but sad sounds there ; the tinkle of the brook, the low ocean-murmur of the cloudy pines, the soft clatter of the leaves, shall all sound funereal to him ; he shall see only the dead limbs upon the trees, and only the inhospitable corners of the rocks, too churlish even for the hardy lichen to pitch his tents upon. For outward nature is but one of the soul's retainers, and dons a festal or a mourning garment according as its

master does. There is nothing sad or joyful in nature, of itself. Autumn is often called a melancholy season; I cannot find it so, though I have often known the summer landscape to seem barer and bleaker than the long gray beach at Nantasket. No; there hangs the wondrous lyre within our reach, its dumb chords bearing the unborn music in their womb, which our touch delivers, — a love-ditty or a dirge. I have no patience with nine-tenths of the descriptive verses I read. It is mere cataloguing, the conciseness and propriety of which an auctioneer might admire, and to him I gladly relinquish it. If I wish for an account of our flowers, the text-books of Professor Bigelow or Gray will amply suffice me; if of our trees, I will be content with Michaux, one of whose volumes I have often found interesting enough to read it through at a single sitting.

PHILIP.

You must make an exception in favor of what the mere fancy, in one of her indifferent moods, colors to her will. The imagination has no neutralities; it takes either one side or the other, as if by a will of its own, and brings all its resources to the support of it. Here is something of Fancy's when she was at her happiest:

"Like a calm
Before a tempest, when the silent air
Lays her soft ear close to the earth, to hearken
For what she fears steals on to ravish her."

D'Ambois.

This, too, has a sweet airiness about it:

"As, when *the moon hath comforted the night*
And set the world in silver of her light,
The planets, asterisms, and whole state of heaven
In beams of gold descending; all the winds
Bound up in caves, charged not to drive abroad
Their cloudy heads; an universal peace,
Proclaimed in silence of the quiet earth."

Byron's Conspiracy.[1]

The following is fine in another way:

"Your Majesty hath missed a noble sight:
The Duke Byron, on his brave beast Pastrana;
Who sits him like a full-sailed argosy
Danced with a lofty billow, and as snug
Plies to his bearer, both their motions mixed."

Byron's Conspiracy.

Chapman excels in metaphors and similes, and as most of them illustrate his descriptive faculty, I will read a few of them.

"We must use these lures when we hawk for friends,
And wind about them like a subtle river,
That, seeming only to run on his course,
Doth search still as he runs, and still finds out
The easiest parts of entry on the shore,

[1] For this and all my other extracts from Chapman's "Byron's Conspiracy," and "The Tragedy of the Duke de Byron," I am indebted to the copious and judicious extracts from those plays in the "Retrospective Review," Vol. IV., they never having been separately reprinted, and therefore being inaccessible, in this country, in their entire form.

Gliding so slyly by, as scarce he touched,
Yet still eats something in it."

Byron's Conspiracy.

This is still better:

" And this wind, that doth sing so in your ears,
I know is no disease bred in yourself,
But whispered in by others, who, in swelling
Your veins with empty hopes of much, yet able
To perform nothing, are like shallow streams,
That make themselves so many heavens to sight,
Since you may see in them the moon and stars,
The blue space of the air, as far from us,
To our weak senses, in those shallow streams,
As if they were as deep as heaven is high ;
Yet, with your middle finger only sound them,
And you shall pierce them to the very earth."

Byron's Conspiracy.

The next is worthy of Shakspeare:

" As you may see a mighty promontory
More digged and under-eaten than may warrant
A safe supportance to his hanging brows,
All passengers avoid him, shun all ground
That lies within his shadow, and bear still
A flying eye upon him ; — so great men,
Corrupted in their grounds, and building out
Two swelling fronts for their foundations,
When most they should be propped, are most forsaken,
And men will rather thrust into the storms
Of better-grounded states, than take a shelter
Beneath their ruinous and fearful weight ;

Yet they so oversee their faulty bases,
That they remain securer in conceit,
And that security doth worse presage
Their near destruction, than their eaten grounds."

Byron's Conspiracy.

The following verses, expressing Byron's conduct when first imprisoned, are very graphic in idea, and have a vast deal of life in the expression. Notice what a hurry and flutter there is in the metre; it jerks impatiently to and fro, as the bird would.

"As a bird,
Entered a closet, which unwares is made
His desperate prison, being pursued, amazed
And wrathful, beats his breast from wall to wall,
Assaults the light, strikes down himself, not out,
And, being taken, struggles, gasps, and bites,
Takes all his taker's strokings to be strokes,
Abhorreth food, and, with a savage will,
Frets, pines, and dies, for former liberty."

Byron's Tragedy.

Chaucer has two passages of which this reminds me, and, as they are very graphic, and I did not read them to you yesterday, I will quote them now.

"Men, by their nature, love newfangleness
As do the birds that men in cages feed;
For, though thou night and day of them take heed,
And strew their cages soft and fair as silk,
And give them sugar, honey, bread, and milk,
Yet, just so soon as e'er the door is up,

They with their glad feet will spurn down their cup,
And to the woods straightway on worms to feed."

The Squire's Tale.

"Take any bird, and put it in a cage,
And, though thou hast the forethought of a mage
To foster it tenderly with meat and drink,
And every dainty that thou canst bethink,
And keep it, too, as cleanly as thou may;
Although the cage with gold be never so gay,
Yet had the bird by twenty thousand fold
Be rather in a forest wild and cold,
To feed on worms and such like wretchedness."

The Manciple's Tale.

JOHN.

I love these homely comparisons drawn from the humble tragedies of every-day life. A poet who shoots all his arrows at the stars may chance to hit us now and then, but it is only by good luck. The heart, which is not so nice in its phrase as the intellect, is more likely to be reached by a humbler aim. I never shall forget the blind despair of a poor little humming-bird which flew through the open window of the nursery where I was playing when a child. I knew him at once for the same gay-vested messenger from Fairy Land whom I had often watched disputing with the elvish bees the treasures of the honeysuckle by the door-step. His imprisoned agony scarce equalled my own; and the slender streaks of blood, which his innocent, frenzied suicide left upon the ceiling, were more

terrible to me than the red witness which Rizzio left on the stair at Holyrood to cry out against his murderers.

PHILIP.

In the poem of "Hero and Leander," begun by Marlow, and finished by Chapman, our poet's lighter qualities are very attractively displayed. There (as how could it be otherwise in such a subject?) he shows more invention and gracefulness of fancy than anywhere else; there, as he himself says of Marlow, he stands

> "Up to the chin in the Pierian flood."

You remember Burns's admirable simile,

> "Like snow-flakes falling on a river,
> A moment white, then gone forever"?

Chapman had used it before him, and with the same application:

> "Joy graven in sense, like snow in water, wastes;
> Without preserve of virtue, nothing lasts."

Warton and the anonymous editor of 1821 would have Chapman's share in the poem commence later. But I cannot conceive how, with the direct and positive testimony of the style before them, they could doubt that he began with the third "sestyad" of the poem. If this verse, —

> "But time and all-states-ordering ceremony,"—

cannot claim him for father, I will never more put faith in physiognomy. There is too strong a fam-

ily likeness between this and many verses in his translations to let us doubt their being of the same parentage. For instance:

"The golden-rod-sustaining-Argus guide:"

"To horse-breed-varying Phrygia likewise send:"

"The all-of-gold-made-laughterloving dame:"

or, to proceed at once to extremities with the doubter, —

"On Ida's-top-on-top-to-heaven's-pole heaped:"

all of which occur in his version of Homer's "Hymn to Venus." Or take these from the "Hymn to Hermes":

"The-that-morn-born-Cyllenius did attain:"

"His-born-to-bark-mouth at him, till, in the end:"

"The more-than-ever-certain deities."

Marlow had none of this taste for handcuffing words together, till they halt along, melancholy and irregular, like a coffle of slaves under the eaves of the Capitol. I must not leave you to think that the compound epithets in Chapman's translations are all like these. Most of them are extremely fresh and spirited, and the translations are, besides their other great merits, full of interest to the student of language. Generally his epithets are truly "winged words," though his zeal sometimes leads him to tie on rather clumsily three or four additional pairs of pinions, which hang awkwardly about them, and prevent their moving their natural wings.

Here is a beautiful passage, opening with a simile:

"And all the while the red sea of her blood
Ebbed with Leander; *but now turned the flood*,
And all her fleet of spirits came swelling in
With crowd of sail, and did hot fight begin
With those severe conceits she too much marked;
And here Leander's beauties were embarked.
He came in swimming, painted all with joys
Such as might sweeten hell; his thought destroys
All her destroying thoughts; *she thought she felt*
His heart in hers; . . . . .
Her fresh-heat blood cast figures in her eyes,
And she supposed she saw *in Neptune's skies*
How her star wandered, washed in smarting brine,
For her love's sake, that with immortal wine
Should be embathed, *and swim in more heart's-ease*
Than there be waters in the Sestian seas."

Hero and Leander. — Third Sestyad.

JOHN.

I cannot say when I have met with an image that so charmed me as this:

"She saw in Neptune's skies
How her star wandered."

The suggestion of the inverted heaven in the sea, and the making Leander, rosy as he was with health and youth and love, into a star, brings a truly Grecian delight with it. Ah, the poet's heart is an unlighted torch, which gives no help to his footsteps, till love has touched it with flame.

PHILIP.

You must read the whole poem. If there be a few blurs in it, it is yet one of the clearest and most perfect crystals in the language, an entire opal, beautiful without the lapidary's help; but it will shine with true pureness only in

"the nunnery
Of a chaste breast and quiet mind,"

like some of Donne's more private and esoteric poems. The same candle may light the soul to its chapel of devotion, or its bed of harlotry. Most of the dramatists of Chapman's time excel in drawing the characters of women. This, no doubt, was partly owing to the greater freedom of intercourse between the sexes, which that less conventional day allowed and encouraged. Now we have become deep-versed in forms and shallow in realities. We have grown so delicately decent that we must need apologize for nature, and make God himself more *comme il faut*.

JOHN.

And yet our decency is indecent. Fashion, being the art of those who must purchase notice at some cheaper rate than that of being beautiful, loves to do rash and extravagant things. She must be forever new, or she becomes insipid. If to-day she have been courteous, she will be rude to-morrow; if to-day thinks her over-refined, to-morrow will wonder at seeing her relapsed into a semi-savage state. A

few years ago certain elaborate and amorphous structures might be seen moving about the streets, in the whole of which the only symptom of animated nature to be discerned was in the movable feet and ankles which conveyed them along. Now even that sign of vitality has vanished; the amorphorus structures move about as usual, but their motive principle is as mysterious as that of Maëlzel's chess-player. My own theory is that a dwarf is concealed somewhere within. They may be engines employed for economical purposes by the civic authorities, as their use has been conjectured by an ingenious foreigner, who observed our manners attentively, to be the collection of those particles of mud and dust which are fine enough to elude the birchen brooms of the police, whose duty it is to cleanse the streets. There is the more plausibility in this theory, as they are actually provided with a cloth train or skirt of various colors, which seems very well adapted to this end. A city poet, remarkable for the boldness of his metaphorical imagery, has given them the name of "women," though from so nice an analogy as hitherto to have eluded my keenest researches.

PHILIP.

It must have been the same who gave the title of "full-dress" to the half-dress worn now by females of the better sort at parties, the sole object of which seems to be to prove the wearer's claim to rank with the genus *lactiferæ*. One-half of the human race, I see, is resolved to get rid of the most apparent token

of our great ancestors' fall, and is rapidly receding to a paradisaical simplicity of vesture. Already have the shoulders emerged from their superstitious enthralment, and their bold example will no doubt be rapidly followed by equally spirited demonstrations from the rest of the body impolitic. For the sake of consistency we must suppose that train-oil will soon elbow the ices from the supper-table. But a truce to this cynical vein. It is, nevertheless, mournful that women, who stint not in large assemblies to show that to the eyes of strangers which the holy privacy of home is not deemed pure enough to look upon, would yet grow crimson with modest horror, through the whole vast extent of their uncovered superficies, if one but dared to call by its dear English name that which, in the loved one, is the type of all maidenhood and sweetest retirement, — in the wife, of all chastity and whitest thoughts, — and in the mother, of all that is most tender and bounteous. On such a bosom, methinks, a rose would wither, and the snowy petals of a lily drop away in silent, sorrowful reproof. We have grown too polite for what is holiest, noblest, and kindest in the social relations of life; but, alas! to blush, to conceal, to lie, to envy, to sneer, to be illiberal, — these trench not on the bounds of any modesty, human or divine. Yes, our English, which for centuries has been the mother-tongue of honest frankness, and the chosen phrase of freedom, is become so slavish and emasculate that its glorious Bacons, Taylors, and Miltons would find their outspoken

and erect natures inapt to walk in its fetters, golden, indeed, and of cunningest Paris workmanship, but whose galling the soul is not nice enough to discern from that of baser metal. The wild singing brook has been civilized; the graceful rudeness of its banks has been pared away to give place to smooth-clipped turf; the bright pebbles which would not let it pass without the tribute of some new music have been raked out; and it has become a straight, sluggish canal.

JOHN.

Yes; the language has certainly become more polished, and necessarily so. What should you say to a naked Pict, in that famous contradictory costume of Sir Richard Blackmore's, in your drawing-room? (By the way, I wonder that no critic has discovered that the dress alluded to was made of *bull's*-hide.) Any writer muscular enough can bend the good old Ulysses'-bow of our language and make it hurl its shafts with as sharp a twang as ever. It is not our speech that has grown cowardly and time-serving, but we ourselves; and we have bribed the language to turn traitor with us. Because *we* do not task it in that cause which is the holiest, because the humblest and weakest and most despised, of all that call Freedom mother, does it therefore refuse its ancient privilege of thunder to the lips of Phillips, or Douglass, or Burleigh, or Abby Kelly? Let the mean apartments into which the church and the state have driven the apostles of that humanity which Christ preached and practised answer! Let the unchartered

majesty of the blue heaven which has never forbid them the shelter of its soaring canopy, when the poor buildings of human hands have been scoffingly denied them, answer!

PHILIP.

Nevertheless, you must allow that the language has lost much of its pristine lustiness by the taint of Gallicism which is more and more creeping over it. It has grown so polite and mincing, and in our brave old Saxon-sprung New England, too! The homely names of man and woman, which sought sanctuary in the cottage and the farm-house, from the luxury, effeminacy, and vice of city and court, must now be driven thence also, and our very dairy-maids and ploughmen must be ladies and gentlemen. We may speak of these things as unconcerned spectators *ab extra*, being necessarily precluded from the privilege of one of these latter titles by virtue of our sex, and from the other by our Abolitionism. Perhaps we may ere long be taught to call our homes papa-land and mamma-country, leaving the uncouth names of father and mother to such as are ignorant or gross enough to be natural. Let us forget that we ever so far yielded to the demoralizing tendency of our baser natures as to have been suckled at our mother's breasts (if we can do so while the present fashion of feminine full-dress retain its sway), and do penance in white kid gloves and French boots for the damnable heresy of our childhood, when we entertained a theory, unfounded as the Ptolemaic system of as-

tronomy, that straightforward truth was respectable, and that women had other developments besides head and arms, our uninspired eyesight to the contrary notwithstanding!

JOHN.

You are getting very merry and very parenthetical at the same time. Let the original topic of our conversation now edge itself in, by way of parenthesis, and let me have a chance of judging for myself of the dignity of Chapman's ideas of woman.

PHILIP.

I heartily thank you for disentangling me so adroitly. Hear Chapman:

"Noble she is by birth made good by virtue;
Exceeding fair; and her behaviour to it
Is like a singular musician
To a sweet instrument, or else as doctrine
Is to the soul, that puts it into act,
And prints it full of admirable forms,
Without which 't were an empty, idle flame;
Her eminent judgment to dispose these parts
Sits on her brow and holds a silver sceptre,
Wherewith she keeps time to the several musics
Placed in the sacred concert of her beauties:
Love's complete armory is managed in her
To stir affection, and the discipline
To check and to affright it from attempting
Any attaint might disproportion her,
And make her graces less than circular:
Yet her even carriage is as far from coyness,
As from immodesty; in play, in dancing,

In suffering courtship, in requiting kindness,
In use of places, hours, and companies,
Free as the sun, and nothing more corrupted ;
As circumspect as Cynthia in her vows,
As constant as the centre to observe them ;
Ruthful and bounteous, never fierce nor dull,
In all her courses ever at the full."

Monsieur D' Olive.

I know what your thoughts are now. You are thinking that there is but *one* to whom these silver-flowing lines may be applied. You think that it is like "the mantle made amiss" of the old romance, which made itself too short for one and too long for another, and yet fitted itself to the shape of the true maiden like a bridal garment.

JOHN.

Nay, you have shot wide. There can be but one in whom each of us can trace the likeness of this rare portrait ; yet it would be doubting the good providence of God, to draw back our heads into the dull tortoise-shell of our selfish unbelief, and refuse to think that there are many such. It is only in love that the soul finds weather as summer-like as that of the clime whence it has been transplanted, and can put forth its blossoms and ripen its fruit without fear of nipping frosts. Never was falser doctrine preached than that love's chief delight and satisfaction lies in the pursuit of its object, which won, the charm is already fluttering its wings to seek some fairer height. This is true only when

love has been but one of the thousand vizards of selfishness, when we have loved ourselves in the beautiful spirit we have knelt to; that is, when we have merely loved the delight we felt in loving. Then it is that the cup we so thirsted after tastes bitter or insipid, and we fling it down undrunk. Did we empty it, we should find that it was the poor, muddy dregs of *self* at the bottom, which made our gorge rise. If it be God whom we love in loving our elected one, then shall the bright halo of her spirit expand itself over all existence, till every human face we look upon shall share in its transfiguration, and the old forgotten traces of brotherhood be lit up by it; and our love, instead of pining discomforted, shall be lured upward and upward by low, angelical voices, which recede before it forever, as it mounts from brightening summit to summit on the delectable mountains of aspiration and resolve and deed.

PHILIP.

You are in the mood now to listen to some favorite passages of mine in one of Taylor's Sermons, in which is a sweet picture of the benign influence of piety in a woman. The extract from Chapman which I last read always brings these into my mind. Let us open the grim-looking old folio once more; there is as much true poetry between its shabby covers as may be found anywhere out of Shakspeare.

"I have seen a female religion that wholly dwelt upon the face and tongue; that, like a wanton and undressed

tree, spends all its juice in suckers and irregular branches, in leaves and gum, and, after all such goodly outsides, you shall never eat an apple, nor be delighted with the beauties nor the perfumes of a hopeful blossom. But the religion of this excellent lady was of another constitution. It took root downward in humility, and brought forth fruit upward in the substantial graces of a Christian; in charity and justice; in chastity and modesty; in fair friendships and sweetness of society. She had not very much of the forms and outsides of godliness, but she was hugely careful for the power of it, for the moral, essential, and useful parts, such which would make her be, not seem to be, religious. . . . In all her religion, and in all her actions of relation toward God, she had a strange evenness and untroubled passage, sliding toward her ocean of God and of infinity with a certain and silent motion. So have I seen a river, deep and smooth, passing with a still foot and a sober face, and paying to the *fiscus*, the great exchequer, of the sea, the prince of all the watery bodies, a tribute large and full; and hard by it a little brook, skipping and making a noise upon its unequal and neighbor bottom, and, after all its talking and braggèd motion, it paid to its common audit no more than the revenues of a little cloud or a contempti-ble vessel. So have I sometimes compared the issues of her religion to the solemnities and famèd outsides of another's piety. It dwelt upon her spirit, and was incor-porated with the periodical work of every day. . . . The other appendage of her religion, which also was a great ornament to all the parts of her life, was a rare modesty and humility of spirit, a confident undervaluing and despis-ing of herself. For, though she had the greatest judgment and the greatest experience of things and persons, that I ever yet knew in a person of her youth and sex and cir-cumstances, yet, as if she knew nothing of it, she had the

meanest opinion of herself, and, like a fair taper, when she shined to all the room, yet, round about her own station, she had cast a shadow and a cloud, and she shined to everybody but herself. . . . But so it was that the thought of death dwelt long with her, and grew, from the first steps of fancy and fear, to a consent, from thence, to a strange credulity and expectation of it; and, without the violence of sickness, she died, as if she had done it voluntarily and by design, and for fear her expectation should have been deceived, or that she should seem to have had an unreasonable fear or apprehension, or rather (as one said of Cato) she died as if she were glad of the opportunity."

JOHN.

Who was this sainted lady? Such a sermon were almost worth dying for.

PHILIP.

Frances, Countess of Carbery. A Latin epitaph is prefixed to the sermon, doubtless written by Taylor himself. The first part of it is quite graceful, but it soon becomes anything but Ciceronian. The great advantage of using Latin for such occasions is, that it operates in some measure as a check and curb upon the writer, and makes him more dignified in spite of himself; but when he breaks free of all restraint, as here, the dead language is more intolerable than the living one. Perhaps another advantage of the Latin for this proverbially flattering kind of literature may be found in the fecundity of its superlatives, there being nothing in our own language that may claim comparison with its glib and liberal *issi-*

muses. I do not know whether one little token of the care with which Taylor regulated the golden balance of his periods has ever been noticed. I mean his frequent elision of the letter *e* in the termination *ed*, to prevent the reader from accenting it. In this he is always guided by so delicate an ear as stands him in stead of metrical rules.

JOHN.

It is certainly worth remarking. By putting Taylor and Chapman together, we get such a picture as realizes Wordsworth's conception of a perfect woman, such a one as we can love, and feel that therein we are made in God's image; such a one as makes love what it should be, venerable, reverend, not a thing to be lightly treated and put on and off like a glove.

PHILIP.

Spenser had a noble idea of love:

> "For love is lord of truth and loyalty,
> Lifting himself out of the lowly dust,
> On golden plumes, up to the highest sky,
> Above the reach of loathly, sinful lust;
> . . . . . .
> Such is the power of that sweet passion,
> That it all sordid baseness doth expel,
> And the refinèd soul doth newly fashion,
> Unto a fairer form."
>
> *Hymn of Love.*

Having made an extract from him whom Milton calls "our sage and serious poet Spenser, whom I

dare to be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas," let me please myself still farther by hanging a sketch of his beside the others, with which it harmonizes fitly. He is speaking of a woman's mind:

> "There dwelt sweet love and constant chastity,
> Unspotted faith, and comely womanhood,
> Regard of honor, and mild modesty;
> There virtue reigns as queen in loyal throne,
> And giveth laws alone,
> The which the base affections do obey,
> And yield their services unto her will;
> Nor thought of thing uncomely ever may
> Thereto approach, to tempt her mind to ill."
>
> *Epithalamion.*

Now repeat to yourself what you remember of Tennyson's "Isabel," and your mind will be as full of silent, silvery images as the heaven is of stars.

JOHN.

If women fulfilled fully their divine errand there would be no need of reforming societies. The memory of the eyes that hung over a man in infancy and childhood will haunt him through all his after life. If they were good and holy they will cheer and encourage him in every noble deed, and shame him out of every meanness and compromise.

PHILIP.

In spite of the side-thrusts which you sometimes make at my Abolitionism, I am persuaded that you

go as far as I do in that matter. I know your humor for appearing what you are not, in order, by opposition, to draw out opinions upon the side which you really espouse. Such is your assumed liking for the artificial school of poetry. You are willing to assume any disguise in order to get into the enemy's camp, and, once there, like Alfred, you sing them a song that sends them all to their arms. A little while ago you spoke approvingly of Miss Kelly; if I had done it, the Thersites-half of your nature would have been aroused at a breath. Do you really love to hear a woman speak in public?

JOHN.

Why not as well as in private, or at all? If any have aught worth hearing to say, let them say it, be they men or women. We have more than enough prating by those who have nothing to tell us. I never heard that the Quaker women were the worse for preaching, or the men for listening to them. If we pardon such exhibitions as those of the dancing females on the stage, surely our prudery need not bristle in such a hedgehog fashion because a woman in the chaste garb of the Friends dares to plead in public for the downtrodden cause of justice and freedom. Or perhaps it is more modest and maidenly for a woman to expose her body in public than her soul? If we listen and applaud, while, as Coleridge says,

> "Heaves the proud harlot her distended breast
> In intricacies of laborious song,"

must we esteem it derogatory to our sense of refinement to drink from the fresh brook of a true woman's voice, as it gushes up from a heart throbbing only with tenderness for our neighbor fallen among thieves. Here in Massachusetts we burn Popish nunneries, but we maintain a whole system of Protestant ones. If a woman is to be an Amazon, all the cloisters in the world will not starve or compress her into a Cordelia. There is no sex in noble thoughts, and deeds agreeing with them; and such recruits do equally good service in the army of truth, whether they are brought in by women or men. Out on our Janus-faced virtue, with its one front looking smilingly to the stage, and its other with shame-shut eyes turned frowningly upon the Anti-slavery Convention! If other reapers be wanting, let women go forth into the harvest-field of God and bind the ripe shocks of grain; the complexion of their souls shall not be tanned or weather-stained, for the sun that shines there only makes the fairer and whiter all that it looks upon. Whatever is in its place is in the highest place; whatever is right is graceful, noble, expedient; and the universal hiss of the world shall fall upon it as a benediction, and go up to the ear of God as the most moving prayer in its behalf. If a woman be truly chaste, that chastity shall surround her, in speaking to a public assembly, with a ring of protecting and rebuking light, and make the exposed rostrum as private as an oratory. If immodest, there is that in her which can turn the very house of God into a brothel.

PHILIP.

I shall not dispute the point with you. I love to hear the voices of women anywhere, but chiefly where truth is pleaded for; they know a shorter way to the heart than those of men do. Chapman valued woman as highly as you do. Hear him:

"Let no man value at a little price
A virtuous women's counsel; her winged spirit
Is feathered oftentimes with heavenly words,
And, like her beauty, ravishing and pure;
The weaker body, still the stronger soul.

. . . . . .

O, what a treasure is a virtuous wife,
Discreet and loving! Not one gift on earth
Makes a man's life so nighly bound to heaven.
She gives him double forces to endure
And to enjoy, by being one with him,
Feeling his joys and griefs with equal sense;
And, like the twins Hippocrates reports,
If he fetch sighs, she draws her breath as short;
If he lament, she melts herself in tears;
If he be glad, she triumphs; if he stir,
She moves his way; . . . . .
And is in alterations passing strange;
Himself divinely varied without change.
Gold is right precious, but his price infects
With pride and avarice; authority lifts
Hats from men's heads, and bows the strongest knees,
Yet cannot bend in rule the weakest hearts;
Music delights but one sense; and choice meats;
One quickly fades; the others stir to sin;

But a true wife both sense and soul delights,
And mixeth not her good with any ill;
Her virtues, ruling hearts, all powers command;
All store without her leaves a man but poor,
And with her poverty is exceeding store;
No time is tedious with her; her true worth
Makes a true husband think his arms enfold
(With her alone) a complete world of gold."

Gentleman Usher.

Here is something very beautiful:

"Exceeding fair she was not, and yet fair
In that she never studied to be fairer
Than nature meant her; *beauty cost her nothing.*"

All Fools.

Of Love he says:

"Love is nature's second sun,
Causing a spring of virtues where he shines;
And as, without the sun, the world's great eye,
All colors, beauties, both of art and nature,
Are given in vain to men; so, without love,
All beauties bred in women are in vain,
All virtues born in man lie buried;
For love informs us as the sun doth colors:
And, as the sun, reflecting his warm beams
Against the earth, begets all fruits and flowers,
So love, fairshining in the inward man,
Brings forth in him the honorable fruits
Of valor, wit, virtue, and haughty thoughts,
Brave resolution, and divine discourse."

All Fools.

JOHN.

Yes; and, wanting love, a man remains nailed to the dreadful cross of self without help or hope. I begin to feel that Chapman is truly a poet. A trickster, a man who loves the art for the applause it wins him, or runs about seeking for Apollo's arrows because they are of gold, concentrates all our admiration upon himself; a true poet makes us forget himself, makes life and the whole human race grow more noble in our eyes. It is only when the instruments are poor and meagre or out of tune, that we think of them, and are conscious of aught but the music they give birth to, or the divine emotions that rise, like Venus, rosy and dripping, from its golden waves.

PHILIP.

Chapman's poetry abounds in striking aphorisms, which often serve to clench and rivet the sense; but he is so fond of them, that he welds them on sometimes as if at random, or even sticks them lightly to the text with a frail wafer. In themselves, they are always full of earnest sense and philosophy. Here are a few examples:

"Time's golden thigh
Upholds the flowery body of the earth
In sacred harmony, and every birth
Of men and actions makes legitimate,
Being used aright: *the use of time is fate.*"

Hero and Leander.

"*Custom, which the apoplexy is*
Of bed-rid nature."

Ibid.

"Who knows not
Venus would seem as fair from any spot.
Of light demeanor, as the very skin
'Twixt Cynthia's brows? *Sin is ashamed of sin.*"

Ibid.

"*Ah, nothing doth the world with mischief fill,*
But want of feeling one another's ill."

Ibid.

"*That which does good disgraceth no degree.*"

Ibid.

Before I shut "Hero and Leander," I will read you a few other passages, though in a wholly different vein. They show him in his most graceful and amiable aspect. This is a pretty little rustic landscape:

"A country virgin, keeping of a vine,
Who did of hollow bulrushes combine
Snares for the *stubble-loving* grasshopper;
And by her lay her scrip that nourished her.
Within a myrtle-shade she sat and sung,
And tufts of *wavering* reeds about her sprung,
Where lurked two foxes, that, while she applied
Her trifling snares, their thieveries did divide,
One to the vine, another to her scrip
That she did negligently overslip;
By which her fruitful vine and wholesome fare
She let be spoiled to make a childish snare."

After an unpropitious sacrifice,

"Hero wept, but her affrighted eyes
She quickly wrested from the sacrifice,
Shut them, and inward for Leander looked,
Searched her soft bosom, and from thence she plucked
His lovely picture; which when she had viewed,
Her beauties were with all love's joys renewed;
The odors sweetened, and the fires burned clear;
Leander's form left no ill object there."

This is beautiful, and ends with a fine truth:

"Her chamber her cathedral-church should be,
And her Leander her chief deity.
For, in her love, these did the gods forego;
And, though her knowledge did not teach her so,
Yet it did teach her this, that what her heart
Did greatest hold . . .
That she did make her god; *and 't was less naught*
To leave gods in profession and in thought
Than in her love and life; for therein lie
Most of her duties and their dignity;
And, rail the brainbald world at what it will,
That 's the grand atheism that reigns in it still!"

These two similes are very fresh:

"His most kind sister all his secrets knew,
And to her, singing, like a shower he flew:"

"Home to the mourning city they repair
With news as wholesome as the morning air."

I must unwillingly lay down the little volume, and come back to glean a few more aphoristic sentences.

"As the light
Not only serves to show, but render us
Mutually profitable, so our lives,
In acts exemplary, not only win
Ourselves good names, but do to others give
Matter for virtuous deeds, by which we live."

D'Ambois.

"Who to himself is law no law doth need,
Offends no law, and is a king indeed."

Ibid.

"Each natural agent works but to this end,
To render that it works on like itself."

Ibid.

"He that observes but as a worldly man
That which doth oft succeed, and by the events
Values the worth of things, will think it true,
That Nature works at random: . . . .
But, with as much proportion, she may make
A thing that from the feet up to the throat
Hath all the wondrous fabric man should have,
And leave it headless, for a perfect man;
As give a full man valor, virtue, learning,
Without an end more excellent than those
On whom she no such worthy parts bestows."

Ibid.

"Virtue is not malicious; wrong done her
Is righted ever when men grant they err."

Mons. D'Olive.

"He is at no end of his actions blest,
Whose ends will make him greatest and not best."

Byron's Tragedy.

Here is a fine metaphor:

"Thy impartial words
Are like brave falcons, that dare truss a fowl
Much greater than themselves."

D'Ambois.

And this:

"The chain-shot of thy lust is yet aloft,
And it must murder."

D'Ambois.

And this:

"As night the life-inclining stars best shows,
So lives obscure the starriest souls disclose."

Epilogue to Translations.

The passions he calls

"Those base foes that insult on weakness,
And still fight housed behind the shield of nature."

D'Ambois.

There is something grand and mysterious in this invocation of a spirit:

"Terror of darkness! O thou king of flames,
That with thy *music-footed* horse dost strike
The clear light out of crystal on dark earth,
And hurl'st instructive fire about the world,
Wake, wake the drowsy and enchanted night
That sleeps with dead eyes in this heavy riddle!

O thou great prince of shades where never sun
Sticks his far-darted beams, whose eyes are made
To shine in darkness and see ever best
Where men are blindest!"

Ibid.

The vague terrors of guilt are thus graphically set forth:

"O my dear servant, in thy close embraces
I have set open all the doors of danger
To my encompassed honor and my life!
Before, I was secure 'gainst death and hell,
But now am subject to the heartless fear
Of every shadow and of every breath,
And would change firmness with an aspen leaf;
So confident a spotless conscience is,
So weak a guilty."

Ibid.

Chapman's self-reliant nature is continually peeping forth from under every mask it puts on:

"When men fly the natural clime of truth,
And turn themselves loose out of all the bounds
Of justice and the straight way to their ends,
Forsaking all the sure force in themselves,
To seek without them that which is not theirs,
The forms of all their comforts are distracted."

Byron's Tragedy.

He thus gives us his notion of what a man should be:

"Give me a spirit that on life's rough sea
Loves to have his sails filled with a lusty wind,

Even till his sail-yards tremble, his masts crack,
And his rapt ship run on her side so low,
That she drinks water, and her keel plows air.
There is no danger to a man who knows
What life and death are; there 's not any law
Exceeds his knowledge; neither is it lawful
That he should stoop to any other law:
He goes before them and commands them all,
Who to himself is a law rational."

Byron's Conspiracy.

JOHN.

Altogether noble! The first few verses illustrate well the natural impetuosity which so much distinguished Chapman's character, as I gather it from what you have read; and the last six exhibit the philosophic gravity and wisdom to which habits of reflection and the life of a scholar had tempered it. He must have been one of those incongruities we sometimes meet with; a man, calm and lofty in his theory, but vehement and fiery to excess in action, — whose very stillness, like the sleep of the top, seems the result of intense motion.

PHILIP.

The same indomitable spirit shows itself in all Chapman's characters. Even their humility is a kind of repressed and concentrated pride. He makes the Duke de Byron say:

"To fear a violent good abuseth goodness;
'T is immortality to die aspiring,
As if a man were taken quick to heaven:

What will not hold perfection, let it burst:
What force hath any cannon, not being charged,
Or being not discharged? To have stuff and form,
And to lie idle, fearful, and unused,
Nor form nor stuff shows. Happy Semele,
That died, compressed with glory! *Happiness*
Denies comparison of less or more,
And, not at most, is nothing. — Like the shaft,
Shot at the sun by angry Hercules,
And into shivers by the thunder broken,
Will I be, if I burst; and in my heart
This shall be written: 'Yet 't was high and right!'"

JOHN.

Chapman's pride has at least all the grandeur in it that pride can ever have; but, at best, pride and weakness are Siamese twins, knit together by an indissoluble hyphen. What a gloriously exulting comparison is that of the shaft of Hercules! The metre also seems to my ear very full and majestic.

PHILIP.

Even his devils are still Chapman. The Evil Spirit says to D'Ambois:

"Why call'dst thou me to this accursed light
For these light purposes? *I am emperor*
Of that inscrutable darkness where are hid
All deepest truths and secrets never seen,
All which I know, and command legions
Of knowing spirits can do more than these.
Any of this my guard that circle me
In these blue fires, from out of whose dim fumes

Vast murmurs use to break, and, from these sounds,
Articular voices, can do ten parts more,
Than open such slight truths as you require."

I know nothing in Marlow's mighty line grander than this. Ford's description of hell, though striking, seems too much like a bill of particulars (if I remember it rightly) and has a kind of ditto-ditto air, which looks quite ordinary beside the mysterious and half-hidden grandeur of these verses. This is such a picture as Fuseli would have painted. Here is something in a softer key:

" A man . . . that only would uphold
Man in his native nobless, from whose fall
All our dissensions rise ; that in himself
(Without *these outward badges of our frailty,*
Riches and honor) knows he comprehends
Worth with the greatest: kings had never borne
Such boundless empire over other men,
Had all maintained the spirit and state of D'Ambois ;
Nor had the full, impartial hand of Nature,
That all things gave in their original,
Without these definite terms of mine and thine,
Been turned unjustly to the hand of Fortune,
Had all preserved her in her prime like D'Ambois.
No envy, no disjunction, had dissolved
Or plucked one stick out of *the golden fagot*
In which the world of Saturn bound our lives,
Had all been held together by the nerves,
The genius, and the ingenious soul of D'Ambois."

You have by this time got a very good idea of Chapman's more prominent and worthy character-

istics. His comedies show him to have been not altogether devoid of humor, though he does not possess the faculty in that exuberance without which it has too much apparent machination to be interesting. "Monsieur D'Olive" is an amusing character, but his fun is chiefly traditional. There is one interesting point in Chapman's comedies, and that is, a trace, discernible here and there, of his admiration for Shakspeare, showing itself in a word or turn of expression suggested by him. There are several examples in his tragedies, too, some of which are remarkable. I confess I love Chapman the better for it. I must give you one more example of his fine poetic instinct. Just before a ghost appears to D'Ambois, he says:

"What violent heat is this? *Methinks the fire*
Of twenty lives doth, on a sudden, flash
Through all my faculties: the air goes high
In this close chamber, and the frighted earth
Trembles and shrinks beneath me."

This is excellent. It would be unfair not to show you the enthusiastic love which Chapman felt for our native language, hallowed as it has been by the use of the noblest poets that ever dignified the earth. In his address to the reader, prefatory to his translation of the "Iliad," he says:

"And, for our tongue, *that still is so impaired*
By travelling linguists, I can prove it clear
That no tongue hath the Muse's utterance heired—
For verse, and that sweet music to the ear,

Struck out of rhyme — *so naturally as this ;*
Our monosyllables so kindly fall,
And meet, opposed in rhyme, as they did kiss."

So in his "*Hymnus in Cynthiam*" :

"Sweet Poesy
Will not be clad in her supremacy
With these strange garments (Rome's hexameters),
As she is English ; but in right prefers
Our native robes, put on with skilful hands."

Chapman's vigor of thought and expression may be seen in every page of his writing. Here is a fragment of his prose ; he is speaking of critics :

"How, then, may a man stay his marvelling to see passion-driven men, *reading but to curtail a tedious hour, and altogether hidebound with affection to great men's fancies*, take upon them as killing censures *as if they were judgment's butchers*, or as if the life of truth lay tottering in their verdicts ?

"Now what a supererogation in wit this is, to think skill so mightily pierced with their loves that she should prostitutely show them her secrets, *when she will scarcely be looked upon by others but with invocation, fasting, watching, yea, not without having drops of their souls, like a heavenly familiar !*" — Dedicatory Epistle to his "Original Hymns."

JOHN.

This has a taste of Milton in it. That metaphor of the heavenly familiar is exceedingly beautiful. It is no wonder that men wrote well who looked upon their art with such religion.

PHILIP.

It reminds me rather of Samuel Daniel's "Defense of Rime," one of the noblest pieces of prose in the language, dignified, eloquent, enthusiastic, and full of rich thoughts, richly clad in the singing-robes of choicest speech. Now let us see how such a man as Chapman would die.

"Let me alone in peace ;
Leave my soul to me whom it most concerns ;
You have no charge of her ; *I feel her free :*
How she doth rouse, and, like a falcon, stretch
Her silver wings, as threatening Death with death,
At whom I joyfully will cast her off !
I know this body but a sink of folly ;
The groundwork and raised frame of woe and frailty ;
The bond and bundle of corruption ;
A quick corpse, only sensible of grief ;
A walking sepulchre ; . . .
A glass of air, broken with less than breath ;
A slave bound face to face with Death, till death :
And what said all you more ? I know, besides,
That life is but a dark and stormy night
Of senseless dreams, terrors, and broken sleeps ;
A tyranny devising but to plague,
And make man long in dying, rack his death, —
And death is nothing: what can you say more ?
I, being . . . a little earth,
Am seated, like earth, betwixt both the heavens,
That, if I rise, to heaven I rise ; if fall,
I likewise fall to heaven : what stronger faith
Hath any of your souls ? What say you more ?
Why lose I time in these things ? Talk of knowledge,

It serves for inward use. I will not die
Like to a clergyman, but like the captain
That prayed on horseback, and, with sword in hand,
Threatened the sun."

Byron's Tragedy.

JOHN.

That is not unlike Byron; but there is a finer and more untrammelled enthusiasm about it than he could rise to without effort. The melody of some verses in it is enchanting. What an airiness, as of the blue, unbounded sky, there is in that passage about the falcon! One feels as if it could not have been spoken but on a lofty scaffold with only the arch of heaven overhead. The whole is very grand, but there is too much defiance in it. It is not so grand as would be the death of one who had learned, with Leigh Hunt, to know that

"Patience and gentleness are power."

The great spirit does not fling down the gauntlet to Death, but welcomes him as a brother-angel, who, knowing the way better, is to be his guide to his new working-place, and who, perchance, also led him hither from some dimmer sphere. "The great good man," says Coleridge, has

"three sure friends:
Himself, his Maker, and *the Angel Death*."

PHILIP.

You must remember, however, that Chapman's hero was a soldier. Let us read another death scene:

"Let my death
Define life nothing but a courtier's breath ;
Nothing is made of naught ; of all things made,
The abstract is a dream but of a shade.
I 'll not complain to earth yet, but to heaven,
And (like a man) look upward even in death.
And if Vespasian thought in majesty
An emperor might die standing, why not I ?
(*One offers to help him.*)
Nay, without help, in which I will exceed him ;
For he died splinted with his chambergrooms.
Prop me, true sword, as thou hast ever done:
The equal thought I bear of life and death
Shall make me faint on no side ; I am up
Here like a Roman statue ; I will stand
Till death have made me marble."

D'Ambois.

JOHN.

This is great, but it is the greatness of a heathen ; of one who would, no doubt, maintain an aristocracy in dying, and prefer the traditionary respectability of the axe to the degradation of the cross, and could not be decently choked out of existence but with a cord of silk. For there are those who would carry only the vanities and titles of life out of it with them, and would have a blazon of arms from the Herald's College buried with them (as the red men do arms of a more serviceable kind), to be a certificate of admission to the higher circles in the next world. How truly ludicrous, by the way, is this claim of subterranean precedence, this solicitude of epitaphs to be exact in giving their due titles to the deceased,

as if the poor ghost were to lug about his tombstone as a visiting-card or a diploma! And if this were the case, how contradictory would some of our titular dignitaries look (stripped, as they would be there, of all outward appliances), whose grandeur is determinable by parallels of latitude, and who, though "Honorables" in their own state, may become quite *dis*-honorable by simply stepping across the border! Would not the shade of a general, for instance, which should come staggering to the gate of immortality under the weight of marble renown piled over his ashes by a grateful country, with such letters of introduction as an epitaph detailing his numerous services would supply, be ranked side by side with that of a Pawnee brave, which should rush whooping in with its equally civilized recommendations in the shape of a string of scalps? It is lucky that we are not taxed to believe the stories which epitaphs tell us, or we should be in despair of the world, thinking that all the good and great had gone out of it. But whither have I wandered in the grave-yard?

PHILIP.

We have not got Chapman's hero thither yet. Let us hear the last:

"O frail condition of strength, valor, virtue,
In me (like warning-fire upon the top
Of some steep beacon on a steeper hill)
Made to express it! like a falling star,
Silently glanced, that, like a thunderbolt,
Looked to have struck and shook the firmament!"

We see that the "equal thought" which he imagined that he bore of life or death, in the moment of inspiring exultation at the idea of dying more imperially than an emperor, breaks under him as the earth crumbles away beneath his feet. This must necessarily be the case with all greatness whose sustenance is drawn from the things of this world. It is but a poor weed, which may grow up in that loose, rich soil, in a single night, to wilt and wither as soon. After all, the great secret is, to learn how little the world is while we are yet living in it. It is no hard lesson after we are removed from it, and it looks but like a grain of dim gold-dust in the infinite distance. Every day of our lives we jostle carelessly by a thousand human souls, each one of which is greater and more substantial than this tiny cockle-shell of a planet, in which we cruise so securely through the shoreless ocean of space, one larger ripple of which would sink it forever. And yet we build monuments, and scratch inscriptions upon its thin deck, and garner stores in its slender-ribbed hold, as for an eternal voyage; and shout our nothings into the tired ear of the great Silence round about us, as if our jack-straw controversies were worth breaking its august slumber with.

JOHN.

A morality whose strict application would put an end to our conversations for the future. But I am not so easily silenced. To all men the moment of death is one of inspiration; a feeling of sublimity

must enlarge the heart and deepen the utterance of the meanest, as earth swims away from under, and leaves him alone, on his new-born wings, in the great void infinite. It were harder, I imagine, to talk basely than nobly, when the soul is waiting but for her green and callow pinions to toughen, and already forecasts her majestic flight. There are souls whose chrysalides seem to have burst, and their wings to have expanded in this life, so that they can, at any time, lift themselves to that clear-aired point of vantage to which death only raises the vulgar; souls, whose flesh seems to have been given them but to make them capable of action while they are the ministers of God's providence to their brothers upon earth.

PHILIP.

But Chapman does not seem to have been one of these

> "world's high-priests who do present
> The sacrifice for all,"

as George Herbert calls them. He was one of those impulsive natures, the fruit of whose age is nowise answerable to the abundant blossoming of their youth; who expend, in a few dazzling flashes, that electricity which, if equally dispersed and circulated, might have made part of the world's healthful atmosphere. Such men must feel in dying that their lives have been incomplete, and must taste the overwhelming bitterness of knowing that *might have been* can bear but a moment's semblance of *was*, from which it differs as

much as the silent streak of a meteor from the perfect circling and fulfilment of a peaceful star. He knew not how, in the words of his brother dramatist, Ford,

"to glorify his greatness with humility;"

a plant which, lowly and despised of men, roots itself in eternity, and grows to be the lofty and unrivable trunk of secure self-sustainment; while pride can never spring in any soil less gross than that of earth. Yet Chapman was cast in a huge mould; there was stuff enough in him to have made some half a dozen modern poets, and the parings might have been kneaded into a novelist or two.

JOHN.

That is not like you. It is a mean and fugitive philosophy, that would hush its conscience by pretending to believe that only the scum and lees of time are left to us. Is not Wordsworth a modern poet? Put such a brain as Chapman's inside of Wordsworth's skull, and it would have as much room as a mouse in the cave of Kentucky; it would be awed alike by the brooding silence and the gigantic whispers, and would creep into a dark corner to hide itself. Chapman's rude and angry hand would have shivered the thousand delicate strings of that wondrous lyre of Rydal, — so sensitive, that even the light fingers of the sunshine can make it tremble; and which has a string to answer all sounds in nature, from the murmur of the breeze and the brook, up to the confused moan of humanity, with melody or pathos more ravishing than their own. No; the strength

of our old poets lay in their unconscious independence. Now, most volumes of poems have a clipped and suppressed look; and if there be any freedom about them, it has a deprecatory and beseeching air, as if it would say, like one of our governor's proclamations, "with the advice and consent of the Council." Or, if they assume an independent bearing, there seems to be a consciousness and determination about it, which robs it of its dignity, and degrades it into a swaggering strut. I dare not say that Wordsworth has not sometimes been guilty of this; that he has not sometimes preferred an unconsciousness (if I may speak so contradictorily) of his own contriving, to that entire, unconditional surrender of himself which the Muse demands. The oracular voices of the deep shun him who follows them for the mere sake of being the depositary and organ of their secrets; as he pursues, they fly before him, and leave him to be deceived by mocking intelligences which he mistakes for theirs; but they throng around him whose only prayer has been for a humble, self-forgetting heart; him who has wrestled in tearful, mad agony with the deceitful pride of intellect, and attained at last to that serene height of humbleness whence all the kingdoms of this world may be seen and rejected, and which gives all the glory to God. My heart is sick when I behold the gallant vessels and rich-laden argosies which have left port with confident cheers and hopes of the multitude, to make shipwreck at last, and strew their wasted freight upon the bleak strand of Ambition!

PHILIP.

I believe you are right when you say that the fault of our modern poets lies in their want of independence and unconsciousness. But how can this be otherwise, when criticism has become so personal a matter? when the critic writes always as a friend or enemy, not of the book or its principles, but of the author? How can Poesy look or feel unconcerned, when Criticism is continually opening the door of her dressing-closet, or at least keeping her sedulous eye at the key-hole? But surely the modern English dramatists are the least unconscious of mortals. They own certain qualities of mind among them in common, like stage properties. Their whole life as authors seems to consist in playing off a farce in which all the Elizabethan dramatists are personated in turn. Each selects his character, and is thereafter recognized by the rest only in that assumed garb. Mr. Jenkins has all the tenderness of Ford, Mr. Tomkins has more than the imagination of Webster, and Mr. Simpkins unites the fire of Marlow with the sound sense of Massinger. This is all very fine and affords the world matter for a laugh; but it is quite idle for them to try to drive life into their dead forms by touching them to the bones of those old buried prophets. There are men among them who would write better plays than Ford or Massinger, if they could only forget for a day or two that Ford and Massinger ever lived. If Shakspeare had striven only to emulate "Gorboduc," we should never have

heard of him. What free motion can we expect to see in a man who carries about with him, wherever he goes, a pair of funeral urns, one upon each arm? If I want an old dramatist I have only to turn to my shelves and invite myself to be of his company, sure of an honest welcome; but I do not like to find him standing, scrimped up as small as possible in order to escape notice, behind the scenes in a modern play, where I must stumble over his toes at every turn. There are characters in the British drama which seem to possess the longevity of the Wandering Jew, and the pertinacious vitality of the clown in a pantomime. After beholding them, not without secret satisfaction, killed in the massacre of the innocents at the end of one tragedy, they suddenly revive in the middle of another, looking as indifferent as if nothing special had happened; and, to increase the wonder, they commonly appear, like the posthumous heroes of a wax collection, in the identical clothes they had on when they were murdered. Practice has made them perfect in this strange accomplishment; they have died so often as to make nothing of it. I have asked my legal friends if some process might not be sued out to keep them dead; but the weak point in the case seems to lie in the want of evidence of any contract on their part to that effect. Hermippus might have learned of them the cheapest method of prolonging life. Jones, who mimics the crowing of a cock so well, suspected a trick. From a certain tenuity in their discourse, he surmised that they were not really living characters, but only the ghosts of

such ; and accordingly, on an evening when he knew that one of them was to appear, stationed himself in the gallery, where zoölogical imitations and improvisations are allowed, to try the effect of the ancient specific for putting such vermin to flight. As soon as the thing appeared upon the stage, our friend crowed, as he avers, with even more than his usual precision ; but it remained entirely unmoved, and was soon after run through the heart, to arise again, doubtless, at the next blast of the scene-shifter's whistle. Jones considers this as conclusive for the bodily-existence theory ; but without any impugnment of his extraordinary powers of imitation, it may be conjectured that the phenomenon (if a ghost) understood the hoax and despised it. I think a real chanticleer should be tried, as that would leave no reasonable doubt.

JOHN.

You have had a long chase after your butterfly. Have you nothing more to read me from Chapman ?

PHILIP.

I will only take leave of him in his own noble words :

" Farewell, brave relics of a complete man !
Look up and see thy spirit made a star,
. . . and, when thou sett'st
Thy radiant forehead in the firmament,
Make the vast crystal crack with thy receipt ;
Spread to a world of fire, and the aged sky
Cheer with new sparks of old Humanity ! "

THIRD CONVERSATION.

THE OLD DRAMATISTS.

JOHN.

I HAVE always thought that our own history supplied many fine plots for tragedy. Hawthorne and Whittier have both drawn upon the persecutions of the early Quakers in New England for subjects. The Salem witch-mania would afford many striking situations. Our good Pilgrim ancestors thought that religion could not see to pick her steps without light now and then from a bonfire of heretics. Perhaps our dramatists may find their account in it. King Philip, and Tecumseh, and Osceola would make good heroes; so would the martyr Lovejoy. The institution of slavery, too, horrible as it is, might give us some materials. But I suppose our refined democracy would not allow another Othello upon the stage. The rudeness of the age in which Shakspeare lived will excuse his want of delicacy; but in an American, and in the ninteenth century, it would be atrocious not to believe in the aristocracy of the feelings.

PHILIP.

No doubt, our poets may find proper subjects without going out of their own geographical terri-

tories; but I would not imprison them within those. What has poetry to do with space and time? Past and future are to her but arcs of one horizon, whose centre is the living heart. Yet how much cant do we hear about a national literature! Let a man make a Pequod or a Cherokee bemoan himself through some dozen or more stanzas in such a style as neither of them ever dreamed of; let him invent a new rhyme for Huron, or a new epithet for Niagara, and he has done something national. What have we to do with a dance of savages more than with one of dervishes, or that of the planets which Pythagoras fancied? Our notion of an Indian is about as true as that which the Europeans have of us. In all the situations which are proper to poetry one man will feel precisely like another; and to the poet it is quite indifferent whether his scene be in Congo or Massachusetts, unless, indeed, he be not strong enough to walk firmly without the external support of old associations or magnificent ones. An Indian whose child dies mourns the loss of one who would have been a great brave and an expert hunter; a tradesman in the same case laments that of a lineal successor behind the counter. Where is the difference in the feeling? Yet in writing about the first, one would be bolstered up with rocks, woods, rivers, lakes, wigwams, scalping-parties, and the whole machinery of savage life, — things merely extraneous and cumbrous, and not at all belonging to the bare feeling one is trying to reproduce. It is merely because of our arbitrary and unnatural as-

sociations with different callings or modes of life, — associations unworthy of men, much more, then, unworthy of poets, — that we esteem the savage more picturesque (or whatever you choose to call it) than the tradesman. In all the feelings with which Poesy concerns herself, the latter may be, and ought to be, superior. The savage has had, it is true, the limbs of the oak-tree for his cradle; the primeval forest and the lonely prairie have been his playmates and nurses; the sky, the waterfall, the thunder, the stars, the legends of his forefathers, these have been his letters and his poetry. But the other, if he has not been dandled by the forest-titan, has had the nobler tutelage of a mother's arms; nature denies herself to him no more than to his savage brother; the stars, and the forest, and the waterfall have their secrets for him as well; and in books he can converse with yet higher company, the ever-living spirits of the brave and wise. Methinks the account between the two is well balanced, or, if not, that the *debit* is on the side of him whom we idly call the child of nature, as if we dwellers in cities were but her foster-sons. A man is neither more nor less a poet because he chooses one subject or another. Did not the cast-away shell of a tortoise become Apollo's lute ?

JOHN.

Yes, but it was the shell of a large one; a mud-turtle's would not have served his turn as well. Time and place are of no consequence to a poet; but his eye should be as poetical in choosing a subject as

afterwards in detecting its nice relations and its happy aspects. He should avoid awakening a predisposed sense of the ludicrous in his readers. No man admires the "Excursion" more than I; to none has it given a truer comfort; yet I never think of its hero as a pedler. Costume is not to be despised. Heroines, you know, according to Mr. Puff, cannot go safely mad but in white satin.

PHILIP.

We should only think of the pedler as a man, without regard to the petty accidents of outward circumstances. The heart is the same in all; else were the poet's power of enchantment gone forever. The soul is indifferent what garment she wears, or of what color and texture; the true king is not unkinged by being discrowned.

JOHN.

Rather made more truly so. But Wordsworth's pedler, with the soul he had, would have been Wordsworth, and an act of parliament could not have made a pedler of him. As the pedler-element is not predominant in him, there was no necessity for making him one; for it is exactly in proportion as any element of character is predominant that it is poetical. Shakspeare's Autolycus is a true pedler; yet his character is as ideal as that of Hamlet, only not in the same kind. The manufacturer's heart becomes poetical when he looks upon Niagara as a mill-privilege. The whole drama of the factory, with the strange hum of its inanimate engines and the

stranger silence of its living ones, the unresting toil of its Titan wheels, that turn with gigantic sluggishness to their task in the gloomy prisons below, is acted over in his mind. The manufacturing nature in him is what makes him a poet, and it is in this light that he presents a poetic phase. Wordsworth's syllogism is logically defective. It does not follow because the poetical faculty or sense is independent of circumstances that a pedler must be a poet. It would be as reasonable to say that a poet must be a pedler. True, a pedler must be a poet to a certain degree; every man must; but it is only to the degree of having the poetic *sense*. When he possesses the *faculty*, he will be pedler no longer.

PHILIP.

Perhaps you are right in an artistic point of view; but I will not quarrel with my ambrosia because it comes to me in an earthen vessel; its fragrance and its gift of immortalizing are the same as if it were sent in Jove's own beaker. It is possible that Wordsworth might have illustrated his noble theory more logically if he had made his hero rise out of his low estate to the higher one of a poet; if, as Willis has exquisitely expressed it in one of his dramas, (perhaps the best in their kind since Fletcher), he had made him

"By force of heart,
And eagerness for light, grow tall and fair."

But why need we consider the pedler in "The Excursion" as anything more than the mouthpiece

of Wordsworth himself? He might, as you admit, have possessed the poetic *sense* as well, being a pedler, as in any other condition of life; and Wordsworth has only put himself in his place, and endowed his dumb images with his own poetic *faculty* of speech. The mind that flies high enough cannot see the pigmy distinctions which we make between different professions; from a true elevation all look of equal height. Milton was a school-master, and might have been a cobbler, like Jacob Behmen, without derogation to his dignity.

JOHN.

Not till he had ceased to be Milton. Behmen mended shoes, and Bunyan soldered pans only so long as they were not yet waited upon by troops of winged visions. If Milton had stitched and patched as well as he built immortal rhyme, he would have deserved equal honor for his fidelity in that humbler duty; but such honor had been husks and chaff to him, if he must meanwhile refuse to bear the heavenly message which had been intrusted to him. The lark rises from a lowly clod of earth, but he bears it not with him to the eaves of heaven. Whatever a man's inward calling is, that will have undivided possession of him, or no share at all in him. If a thought or wish stray from its entire fealty and surrenderment to that divine presence in him, his vision of it becomes straightway clouded; its oracles become indistinct to his ear; and his utterance of them unintelligible, or but faint reminiscence instead of

obedient and literal report. A virtue goes away from him whenever any other desire touches but the hem of his mantle. That alone must be the Egeria of the restless fountain of his heart, to which he turns, in solitude and silence, for wisdom and for consolement. True it is that any worldly avocation that may further him in the service of this miraculous intelligence, which has condescended to make him its slave, becomes not only tolerable, but holy. If Milton must get bread to keep the spirit in him till it have uttered itself, would not every poor crust, though earned by the meanest employment, have a flavor and fragrance of Eden in it ?

"His humblest duties *that* hath clad with wings."

If this Wordsworthian pedler had been the man his speech betrays him for, we should not have first heard of him from under the laurels of Rydal Mount. After once becoming aware of those strong wings of his, after once balancing himself upon them in the illimitable air of song, he would never have borne pack and measured tape again. As soon might you entice the butterfly back into his old hovel in the dingy grub after he had tasted all those nectarous delights which Spenser so lusciously describes in his "Muiopotmos." If he had looked on nature with a pedler's eye, the character would have been well enough; but he was all poet. We have talked about this longer than was necessary. We do not agree, nor should we be pleasant companions if we did. This would be a dull world indeed, if all our

opinions must bevel to one standard; when all our hearts do, we shall see blue sky, and not sooner.

PHILIP.

A part, certainly, of what you have said jumps with my opinions precisely. It is true that every man has his infallible and inexorable monitor within — a conscience that forewarns, as well as one that reproves; and it were hard to tell which wields the sharper lash. Nature throws the tools of whatever art she destines a select soul for invitingly in his way. The burnt stick from the hearth must be the pencil, and the wall the canvas, for the future painter. There must be a linkboy wanted at "the Globe," when the young Shakspeare runs away to London. Somehow or other there chances to be a clay-pit or a pottery near the birthplace of the young sculptor; and wherever a poet or a musician is born, there will be an odd volume of Spenser, or a cracked spinnet, in the house. There is something more than a mere predisposition in the soul of a great genius (if, without offence, we may guess at these cryptic mysteries), which compels him into the path he must tread. If he deny and frustrate it, the whole face of nature looks at him sorrowfully and with a tender yet half-contemptuous reproach. He cannot cast away from him this badge of the friendship of the supernal powers; if he try, it is brought back to him next day, like the ring of Polycrates. "Here stand I: *I cannot help it*," says stout Martin Luther, almost regretfully, exiled from his quiet convent-cell

by this superior will. Is not this the meaning of *having a genius* — an expression of a truth which has had all its sharp edges worn off and has become a mere phrase, in coming down to us from the simpler and more inseeing day when it was invented ? The supernatural calling carries a pain with it, too. The ancients were wont to say that he who saw a god must die. Perhaps this only meant that he who has gazed deepest into the vast mysteries of being, and held closest converse with the Eternal Love, is overpowered by the yearning and necessity to speak that which can never be wholly spoken, and which yet seems ever hovering in fiery words upon the tongue. The music of the mighty universe crowds through the slender reed, and shatters it with the very excess of quivering melody.

JOHN.

Certain it is that without this law of genius, which compels it to utter itself as it best may, very few great words had been spoken, or great deeds done. Every great man is more or less tinged with what the world calls fanaticism. Fanaticism, in its ill sense, is that which makes a man blind to perceive the falseness of an error : the fanaticism of genius will not let him be persuaded that there is any lie in truth. The disbelief of the whole world cannot shake his faith that he is God's messenger, which upbears him as upon the Rock of Ages. He knows that the whole power of God is behind him, as the drop of water in the little creek feels that it is moved onward by the

whole weight of the rising ocean. Unsupported by any of earth's customs or conventions, he learns to lean wholly on the Infinite. The seal of God's commission is set within, and has no ribbons about it to make it respectable in the eyes of the many. Most men are fearful of visitings from the other world, and set on by those whose interest lies mainly in this, they look with distrust, and often with ignorant hate, on him who converses with spirits.

PHILIP.

Yes, men always deny the messenger of God at first. The spiritual eye, like that of the body, until taught by experience, sees objects reversed, and makes that seemingly come from hell which has in truth but just descended, warm and fragrant, from the heart of God. But Time can never put Eternity off more than a day; swift and strong comes the fair to-morrow, and with it that clearer perception of the beautiful, which sets another fixed star in the bright coronet of Truth.

JOHN.

But when the world is at last forced to believe the message, it despitefully entreats the bearer of it. In most cases men do not recognize him till the disguise of flesh has fallen off and the white wings of the angel are seen glancing in the full sunshine of that peace, back into whose welcoming bosom their flight is turned. If they recognize him earlier it is with a scurvy grace. Knowing that hunger is the best taskmaster for the body, and always using to

measure spirit by the laws of matter, they conclude that it must be the sharpest spur for the soul also. They hold up a morsel of bread, as boys do to their dogs, and tell the prophet to speak for it. They know that he has a secret to tell them, and think they can starve it out of him, as if it were an evil demon.

PHILIP.

It is true enough that hunger is the best urger of the soul; but it is the hunger, not of the body, but of the soul, which is love. A state of rest and quietude in the body is the most conformable to the happiness and serenity, and so to the undisturbed utterance, of the soul. Love, which is its appetite, quickens the soul of the seer,

> "*And then, even of itself, it high doth climb;*
> *What erst was dark becomes all eye, all sight,*"

as Dr. More phrases it. The distracting cares and dunnings of want are not the best nurses of genius; it has self-dependence enough without their prompting. It may take other sorrows and thank God for them, for sorrow alone can unlock the dwelling of the deeper heavenly instincts; but there is bitter enough in its cup, always, without the world's squeezing its spare drops of rue in.

JOHN.

Perhaps actual want may be inconsistent with that serenity of mind which is needful to the highest and noblest exercise of the creative power; but I am not ready to allow that poverty is so. Few can dignify it like our so admirable prose-poet, whose

tales are an honor even to the illustrious language they are written in; few can draw such rich revenues of wise humbleness from it as our beloved R. C.; few can win a smile from it by his Lambish humor, and that generous courtesy which transmutes his four-pence into a bank-note in the beggar's eyes, like S.; but there is none for whom it has not some kind lesson. Poverty is a rare mistress for the poet. She alone can teach him what a cheap thing delight is; to be had of every man, woman, and child he meets; to be gathered from every tree, shrub, and flower; nay, to be bought of the surly northwestern wind himself, by the easily-paid instalments of a cheerful, unhaggling spirit. Who knows the true taste of buns but the boy who receives the annual god-send of one with election-day? Who ever really went to the theatre but Kit Nubbles? Who feels what a fireside is but the little desolate, barefooted Ruths, who glean the broken laths and waste splinters after the carpenters have had a full harvest? Who believes that his cup is overflowing but he who has rarely seen anything but the dry bottom of it? Poverty is the only seasoner of felicity. Except she be the cook, the bread is sour and heavy, and the joint tough or overdone. As brisk exercise is the cheapest and warmest overcoat for the body, so is poverty for the heart. But it must be independent, and not of Panurge's mind, — that to owe is a heroic virtue. Debt is like an ingenious mechanical executioner I have read of somewhere, which presented

the image of a fair woman standing upon a pedestal of three steps. When the victim mounted the first, she opened her arms; at the second, she began to close them slowly around him; and at the third, she locked him in her iron embrace forever. On the other hand, however, poverty has its bad side. Poverty in one hour's time shall transport a man from the warm and fruitful climate of sworn brotherhood with the world into the bare, bleak, desert, and polar ice-field of distant country-cousinship; and the world's whole duty of man towards him becomes on a sudden the necessity of staving off asking him to dinner. Then, for the first time, he gets an insight into the efficacy of buttons, and discovers, to his great surprise, that the world has one at each pocket. This gives him an excellent hint for a sonnet to a button, comparing it to the dragon of the Hesperides, in which he gets no further than the end of the second quatrain, finding it impossible to think of anybody or anything analogous to Hercules in his victory over the monster. Besides, he now learns that there are no golden apples to be guarded, the world assuring him on its honor that it has enormous sums to pay and not a cent to meet them with. In a fit of inspired despair he writes an elegy, for the first two stanzas of which (for he has learned economy) he uses up the two quatrains already adjusted for his sonnet. By employing the extremely simple process of deduction invented by the modern expounders of old myths, he finds that Hercules and Οὔτις are identical, and

that the same word in the Syro-Phœnician language imports a dragon and a button. The rest of the elegy is made easy by merely assuming the other steps of the proposition, as every expounder of old myths has a clear right to do, by a rule of logic founded on the usage of the best writers in that department. He therefore considers the heart in the poetical light of a pocket or garden of Hesperides, buttoned up tight against all intruders. As Scripture is always popular, he ends by comparing it also to that box which Jehoiada set at the gate of the temple, which had a hole in the top ample enough to admit the largest coins, though you might shake till you were tired without getting the smallest one out of it. Having now commenced author, we may as well leave him; for, at that lowest ebb of fortune, the bare, muddy flats of poverty lie exposed, and the tide must soon turn again.

PHILIP.

That poverty may be of use to the poet, as you have said, may be granted, without allowing that it must come to the actual pinch and gripe of want with him. The man of genius surely needs it not as a spur, for his calling haunts him from childhood up. He knows that he has that to say that will make the great heart of the universe beat with a more joyous peacefulness and an evener motion. As he grows to man's estate, the sense of a duty imposed on him by nature, and of a necessary obedience to heavenly messengers, which the world neither sees

nor acknowledges, grows stronger and stronger. The exceeding brightness of his countenance weaves a crown around his head out of the thick air of earth; but earthlings cannot see it. He tells his errand, and the world turns its hard face upon him, and says, "Thou art a drone in my busy hive; why doest thou not something?" Alas! when the winter season comes, the world will find that he had been storing honey for it from heavenly flowers, for the famishing heart to feed upon. He must elbow through the dust and throng of the market, when he should be listening to the still, small voice of God; he must blaspheme his high nature, and harden his heart to a touchstone to ring gold upon, when it is bursting with the unutterable agony of a heavenly errand neglected, — that bitterest feeling of having "once had wings." The world has at last acknowledged his sovereignty, and crowned him with a crown of thorns. Thomson, in one of his letters, says:

"The great fat doctor of Bath told me that poets should be kept poor, the more to animate their genius. This is like the cruel custom of putting a bird's eye out, that it may sing the sweeter."

The world plays the great fat doctor very well.

JOHN.

Mr. Putnam, in his late oration, made himself merry over the complainings of genius, and the comfortable audience laughed pleasantly as he told genius to take its lazy hands out of its pockets and go to

work. "Do the duty that lies nearest thee," said he, enlisting Goethe's brave word for the occasion, but forcing it to a new service. Nothing is so apt to lead men astray as their sense of the ludicrous; no kindly feeling is so apt to make them say harsh things. To judge by the fine face of the orator, none would have been readier than he to have dropped a quiet drachma into the hat of the blind old Mæonides, or to have thought a song of his too ample payment for a week's lodging. It has not been the men of genius who have whined and whimpered: it has been those who have mistaken their own vague longings and pitiful ambitions for the summonses of the true voice. Genius locks its sorrows in its own invincible heart; from those awful deeps a moan may sometimes wander, but no complaint; the voice may become sadder and the face more careworn, but that noble pity is not for itself; it is because of the adder-deafness which seals the ears of the world against the entrance of the eternal melodies of which it believes itself the instrument; its lips are ever

> "As Cumæ's cavern close,
> Its cheeks with fast and sorrow thin,
> Its rigid front almost morose,
> But for the patient hope within."[1]

[1] From a fine poem "On the Bust of Dante" (its metre as severe, and its images as stern and sharp-cut, as the lines in the bust it commemorates), prefixed by T. W. Parsons, one of our most truly classic and delightful poets, to his translation of the first ten cantos of the "Inferno." It is to be hoped, for the honor of our literature, that the translator may be encouraged to proceed in his excellent undertaking.

PHILIP.

Mr. Putnam forgot that the duty which lies nearest a man of genius is to *be* a man of genius; and it is a duty which no one else can perform for him. That is the first duty; after that is well done, he may think of other subordinate ones. God did not lay it upon him that it might starve him or isolate him. Whatever idiosyncrasies he endows his creatures with, he intends them as the tools for them to earn their bread with. The same wings on which the bobolink hangs vibrating, rapturous with song, bear it also in search of the grub and the rice field; the same structure which gives the swan his frigate-like majesty upon the water enables it also to pursue and secure its food. The world owes all created beings a living, not in return for any performance it has laid upon them, but for doing what they are intended and foreordained to do. The man of genius has an injunction laid upon him to fulfil a certain destiny; if he neglect it, bread will not quench his hunger nor water his thirst; he is wholly cut off from the great catholic communion of nature; if he obey it, there seems to be no such thing as starving him till it be accomplished. The poet will and must sing, in spite of want or any other misery; but we know not how much sweeter and clearer his voice would have been but for these. The infinite beauty and harmony which he sees and hears force him to give vent to the glorious agony which swells his breast:

"The sweetness hath his heart ypierced so,
He cannot stint of singing by the way."

He has no choice in the matter; the crown will find out David while he tends his flocks; the javelin hurled at him will quiver harmless in the wall. There *is* such a thing as peculiarity of temperament, and you shall not find one of the thousand crafts in which men are employed but has one of its own. How came Mr. Putnam to be delivering that very oration?

JOHN.

I will propose to you another question equally easy of solution. How comes it that Italians have a patent-right to suffer by convulsions of nature? Yet such is the fact. Let there be an eruption of Cotopaxi or Hecla, let the earth turn in its sleep and shake itself in the Society Islands, and in less than a week an Italian shall thrust into your hand a certificate, properly authenticated, that he has lost his all by one of them. How does it chance, also, that these true pensioners of nature (for they undoubtedly get a living that way, benevolence serving as a kind of insurance policy) have always large families of children? You speak of nature's providence in her endowment of the bobolink and the swan; but what is it in comparison with the forethought she employs to the furnishment of these? An eruption is a year's support to them; an earthquake more destructive than common is a life annuity. Whenever she is about to touch a match to one of her underground magazines, she sets them down just over it; she

saves them from the destructive wrath of the explosion, and then supplies them with some means of locomotion to the abodes of the charitable which transcends any swiftness of man's device. Before the news of the catastrophe, they are at our doors. This peculiar gift of that nation may perhaps be yet turned to account in the forwarding of despatches. It is worth considering, at least. Again, how comes it to pass that none but destitute Irishmen are ever desirous of obtaining the means of reaching equally destitute wives and children at Halifax, and that they are sometimes years in performing that desolate and pious pilgrimage, being inexplicably detained for months in any village where there are believing ears and generous hearts? Some philosophers will have it that the tools of every animal and vegetable are the forced productions of self-preserving instinct; that the grapevine was set to climb the tree till its despair had escaped in prehensile tendrils, that the duck was tossed into the sea to drown till its fears had found a vent and a remedy in webbing its feet. Was it some such instinct which provided the emigrant Switzer with that natural excrescence of his tyrannous, indefatigable, tax-gathering barrel-organ?

PHILIP.

I see that you are weary of our discussion. Let me put in two more pieces of evidence before the case goes to the jury. They are the depositions of Edmund Spenser and James Thomson. The first testifies to this effect:

"O, what avails it of immortal seed
To bin ybred, and never born to die?
Far better I it deem to die with speed,
Than waste in woe and wailful misery!"

He gives the same testimony more at full in his "Mother Hubbard's Tale." Nor is the other less explicit:

"To every labor its reward accrues,
And they are sure of bread who swink and moil;
. . . . .
But while the laws not guard that noblest toil,
Ne for the Muses other meed decree,
They praisèd are alone, and starve right merrily."

JOHN.

Now let us open Ford's "Plays," which, I see, is the volume in your hand.

PHILIP.

Ford's dramatic abilities have, I think, been rated too highly. He has a great deal of tragic *excitability and enthusiasm*, and a good knowledge of stage-effect; but these are the predominant qualities of his nature. In the strong mind they are always subservient. Ford can *see* the proprieties and beauties of a fine situation; but he has not that dignity in him which can create them out of its own substance. His poetic faculty leans upon the tragic element in his stories for support, instead of being the foundation of it. Tender and graceful he always is, almost to excess; never great and daring. He does not

seem to me to deserve the high praise which, if I remember rightly, Lamb bestows upon him, and which other less judicious critics have repeated.

JOHN.

The sweet lovingness of Lamb's nature fitted him for a good critic; but there were knotty quirks in the grain of his mind, which seemed, indeed, when polished by refined studies, little less than beauties, and which we cannot help loving, but which led him to the worship of strange gods, and with the more scrupulous punctuality that the mass were of another persuasion. No field is so small or so barren but there will be grazing enough in it to keep a hobby in excellent case. Lamb's love was of too rambling and wide-spreading a kind to be limited by the narrow trellises which satisfy a common nature. It stretched out its feelers and twined them around everything within its reach, clipping with its tender and delicate green the fair tree and the unsightly stump alike. Everything that he loved was, for the time, his ideal of loveliness. Even tobacco, when he was taking leave of it, became the very "crown of perfumes," and he affirmed

> "Roses and violets but toys
> For the greener sort of boys
> Or for greener damsels meant."

PHILIP.

In this, and in the finer glimpses of his humor, and in the antique richness of his style in its best

parts, he reminds me of Emerson; but he had not the divine eye of our American poet, nor his deep transparency and majestic simpleness of language, full of images that seem like remembrance-flowers dropped from between the pages of Bacon, or Montaigne, or Browne, or Herbert; reminding us of all felicitous seasons in our own lives, and yet infused with a congenial virtue from the magic leaves between which they had been stored. John Ford, though he cannot rank with the first order of minds, yet claims an instinctive deference, as one of that glorious brotherhood who so illustrated and dignified our English tongue at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Set beside almost any of our modern dramatists, there is certainly something grand and free about him; and though he has not that "large utterance" which belonged to Shakspeare, and perhaps one or two others of his contemporaries, he sometimes rises into a fiery earnestness which falls little short of sublimity, and proves that he had in him, as Drayton said of Marlow,

> "Those brave translunary things,
> That our first poets had."

It is this abandoned earnestness and willingness and simplicity which so much elevate the writers of that age above nearly all succeeding ones. In their companionship, a certain pardoning and compromising restraint, which hampers us in the society of less unconscious writers, seems to be thrown off the mind. Here, at last, we find frankness; contempt of con-

sequences; dignity that finds graceful sustenance in the smallest and most ordinary events of to-day, as well as in the greatest, or in prophecies of a nobler to-morrow. They laid the deep-set bases of their works and thoughts in the cheap but eternal rock of nature, not idly writing their names upon the shifting and unstable sands of a taste or a prejudice, to be washed out by the next wave, or blurred and overdrifted by the first stronger breeze. Pegasus is the most unsafe of hobby-horses. The poet whose pen is governed by any self-built theory (even if he persuade men to believe in it) will be read only so long as that theory is not driven out by another.

JOHN.

Yet a creed or theory may sometimes be of good service in the cause of truth. They concentrate the will and energy of a strong mind upon one point, and so lead to the discovery of such facts as intersect that point in their revolutions; as the wells of the old astronomers, by shutting out all light from around, enabled them to see the else invisible stars.

PHILIP.

But the credit should rather be given to the concentrated resolution than to the creed or theory. Resolution is the youngest and dearest daughter of Destiny, and may win from her fond mother almost any favor she chooses to ask, though in very wantonness. The great spirits of that day were of no school, except that in which their own soul was

mistress. The door to the temple of any creed was too low to admit men of their godlike stature without stooping, and that they could not do. They scorned those effeminate conventionalities which half a century later decked our ruddy English Muse in the last Paris modes, bound up and powdered her free golden hair, and so pinched her robust waist that she has scarce borne a healthy child since. Poesy, with them, was not an artifice in the easy reach of any whose ear could detect the jingle of two words, and who had arithmetic enough to count as high as ten on their finger-ends. They believed that Poesy demanded the enthralling and ennobling toil of a whole life, the heart, soul, will, life, everything, of those who professed her service. They esteemed her the most homelike and gentle of spirits, and would not suffer her to travel abroad to bring home licentiousness veiled under a greater precision of manner, at the expense of all freedom and grace. The innocent artlessness of her face looked sweetest to them in the warm firelight upon the hearth of home. They knew that all the outward forms of poetry are changeable as those of a cloud. These fall away like the petals of a flower, but they leave the soul, the plain, sober seed-vessel which most men pass by unregarded. Parnassus is now shrunk to a modern mountain; Hippocrene has dwindled to a scant rill, which the feet of a single ox can make muddy through its whole course; but while the heart remains the poet's fountain bubbles up as clear and fresh as ever.

JOHN.

Only that part of a form which is founded in nature can survive; the worth of the statue of Memnon as an oracle died with the wise priest who spoke through it; but after three thousand years it still recognizes its ancient god, and grows musical under the golden fingers of sunrise. I confess I can hardly shake off the influence of early education in favor of the French school of poets. I admire the others with a kind of reverence, as grand, natural, unpruned spirits; but I find my entertainment, too, in these, as in the society of elegant gentlemen with whom artificiality has been carried well-nigh to the unconscious ease of nature. Dryden —

PHILIP.

But I will not grant him for one of them. He could not smother his sturdy English spirit. His Gallicism is ridiculous, as in his plays. It is not ingrained. I will give you an example of what English-French must be, by quoting a specimen of French-English. Here is a French translation of Gray's Odes, published at Paris, in the sixth year of the Republic.

JOHN.

Without allowing it to be an argument, I can conceive that it must be a great curiosity. Let me hear some of it.

PHILIP.

You will not be disappointed. It is in prose and the translator avows that his sole object has been to

be literally exact. Fidelity first, then elegance, is his motto; but you will see that he has not forgotten the lessons of the posture-master. He tells us in his preface that he undertook the enterprise,

"autant pour faciliter l'intelligence de la langue Anglaise, que pour faire connoître en France *un digne rival d'Ossian, de Dryden, et de Milton*. Exactitude rigoureuse à la lettre et au sens, voilà la systême qu'on a cru devoir adopter. Mais en s'attachant à rendre littéralement les pensées, les expressions, les images, et les figures de l'auteur Anglais, on n'en a pas moins senti la nécessité d'écrire avec purété, élégance, et précision."

In the first Ode, the line,

"Disclose the long-expecting flowers,"

is rendered,

"Elles ouvrent le bouton des fleurs impatientes."

"Some show their gayly-gilded trim,
Quick glancing in the sun,"

"D'autres dans leurs jeux vifs et légers, font étinceler au soleil l'or de leur *légante parure*."

In the "Ode on a Distant View of Eton College," "Father Thames" is translated "fleuve *paternel*;" and the lines,

"This racks the joints, this fires the veins,
That every laboring sinew strains,"

are thus given:

"L'une torture les articulations, l'autre allume le sang; celles-ci tiraille douloureusement tous les nerfs."

In the fourth Ode,

"Stern, rugged nurse! thy rigid lore,
With patience many a year she bore,"

is rendered,

"Austère et rude institutrice, c'est sous ta discipline sévère qu'elle apprit à exercer sa patience *pendant nombre d'années.*"

In the fifth Ode,

"To brisk notes in cadence beating,
Glance their many-twinkling feet,"

"*Rapides comme le clin-d'œil,* leur pieds brillans répondent en cadence à la vivacité des airs; "

"With arms sublime that float upon the air,
In gliding state she wins her easy way,"

"Les bras élevés et flottans dans les airs, *elle s'avance avec une noble aisance et glisse légèrement vers la terre;* "

"She deigns to hear the savage youth repeat
In loose numbers, wildly sweet,"

"Elle ne dédaigne pas d'écouter les mètres incorrects des jeunes sauvages qui chantent en refrains grossièrement cadencés ; "

"Yet shall he mount and keep his distant way
Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate,
Beneath the good how far — but far above the great,"

"Cependant il s'élevera, et il a marqué sa place à une grande distance des bornes d'un destin vulgaire, trop peut-être *au-dessous des bons poètes, mais bien au-dessus des grands!*"

I have spared you the trial of the Scandinavian odes, but hardly think you will desire more. Those from which I have quoted are the most French of Gray's Odes. I only wish the translator had attempted them in verse.

JOHN.

At the worst it is a pleasure to have one's old associations revived by the line or two here and there which you have quoted from the original poems. The annotators may convince us that Gray never used a thought, image, or word, of his own, in all his verses; we should like him still as a delicate worker in mosaic, and skip all the accusatory notes at the bottom of the page. So much originality is there always in grace! Gray is the Barrington of poets; but who shall get him convicted and transported? And what place is good enough to be a Botany Bay for him? *Nihil surripuit quod non ornavit.*

PHILIP.

Gray came when the British Muse was in a *deliquium;* and, while she was lying as if *in articulo mortis*, the critics rushed in and took possession of the house as sole legatees. They locked up everything and put their seals upon it; nothing must be

used without a written order from them; not a meal must be served up except it be a hash of yesterday's leavings. Things must take a new turn now; they had no notion of seeing their soon-to-be-sainted kinswoman's substance wasted as it had been, especially when one Shakspeare was major-domo; they would soon have order among the servants in the house, or somebody would smart for it; everything had been too long at sixes and sevens. But, in the midst of their predacious technicalities, in stalks the undoubted eldest son, not a very polished personage, and with hands hardened by coarse familiarity with Mossgiel ploughtails, but the true heir nevertheless. He slaps the powdered wigs of the technical gentlemen in their eyes, and they vanish, like Aubrey's ghost, "with a melodious twang," vowing to take the law of him. It was a great mercy that he did not serve them as Ulysses did the waiting-maids.

JOHN.

To open a volume of Burns, after diluting the mind with the stale insipidities of the mob of rhymers who preceded him, reminds me of a rural adventure I had last summer. Skirting, in one of my walks, a rocky upland which hemmed in the low salt-marsh I had been plashing over, I came, at a sudden turning, upon a clump of wild red lilies, that burned fiercely in a kind of natural fireplace, shaped out for them by an inward bend of the rock. How they seemed to usurp to themselves all the blazing July sunshine

to comfort their tropical hearts withal! How cheap and colorless looked the little bunch of blossomed weeds I had been gathering with so much care! How that one prodigal clump seemed to have drunk suddenly dry the whole overrunning beaker of summer to keep their fiery madness at its height!

PHILIP.

The poets had been afraid that the light of the natural sun would put their fires out, and kept the shutters fast barred accordingly. Burns, with one lusty spurn of his foot, got rid of all the old clumsy machinery. Men began to fall in love with being natural, and to grow unaffected to the extreme point of affectation. But there is such a thing as being *too* natural; we must remember that it was with a twig of green mistletoe that Baldur, the Scandinavian Apollo, was slain. Delighted to see Burns whistling and singing after his plough, and wearing his clouted shoon into the Edinburgh drawing-rooms, some ingenious gentlemen, resolved to possess themselves of his secret, whistled and sang louder than he, wore thicker soles, and dragged a plough after them wherever they went. The old poets lived in too sincere an age and were too truly independent to think independence a virtue. To try to be independent is to acknowledge our slavery. It was not from ignorance of rules and unities that the old dramatists committed anachronisms, made islands of countries set in the heart of continents, and put English oaths into the mouths of Roman mobs; they

broke through such critical cobwebs, for they were never spun to catch eagles in. The laws of poetry, as they are called, are only deductions drawn by certain mathematical minds from the works of established authors; let a new genius come, and these are incompetent to measure him. There is a most delicate, yet most unbending conscience in the heart of every true poet, from whose approval or rejection of all pre-established laws he feels that there is no appeal. If he prefer the verdict of the world to that of this instinctive voice, it is all over with him; thenceforth he is but an echo, and his immortality as frail as that. What cared our old dramatists for Aristotle's poetics? They laid their scenes in the unchangeable heart of man, and so, like Donne's fancy,

"Made one little room an everywhere."

They scorned to bow the knee to any authority whose feet were of clay. They knew that he who strives to keep an act of fealty to slavery secret defies his own consciousness. Some strange providence always makes it public and open as the prostration of King Ottocar. The homage that a man does in his secretest soul is visible to all time; there will be a cringe and stoop in his shoulders in spite of him. The galling mark of the fetter will never out; men read it in every line he writes, hear it in every word he speaks, and see it in every look he looks. Though he be no longer the slave of a coward deference to the opinion of the many, merely because they are the many, he is still the bondman of Memory, who can make him

crouch at her bidding. You may think that the writers of that day had no daws to peck at them; but hear the admired Sir John Harrington, who, in his "Apology for Poesy," says:

"We live in such a time in which nothing can escape the envious tooth and backbiting tongue of an impure mouth; and wherein every corner hath a squint-eyed Zoilus that can look aright on no man's doings."

Even King James, whose authorship was most likely as secure from such rubs as any, prefixes this quotation to his "Rules for Scottish Verse":

"To ignorants obdurde, where wilful error lies,
Nor yet to carping folks, whose malice may deject thee,
Nor to such folks as think them only wise,
But to the docile bairns of knowledge I direct thee."

I have quoted these royal rhymes from memory, and may not have done them full justice; but I am sure I have given them with enough exactness.

But a subject on which I love to talk has led me astray; let us return to Ford. His dramatic power consists mainly in the choice of his plots. His characters, as is often the case with those of retired students, are rather certain turns of mind or eccentricities put into a body, than real men and women.

JOHN.

He does not carry matters quite so far as some ater writers who go to the expense of a whole human frame for the mere sake of bringing a single humorous phrase upon the stage, the sole use of the

legs being to carry about the body, that of the body to sustain the head, and that of the head to utter the said humorous phrase at proper intervals. Friar Bacon's head, or one of those "airy tongues" which Milton borrowed of Marco Polo, would save these gentry a great waste of flesh and bone, if it could be induced to go upon the stage.

PHILIP.

No; Ford is not quite so spendthrift in human beings as that. Guardians should be appointed for such authors, as for those who cannot take care of their estates. His plots raise him and carry him along with them whither they please, and it is generally only at their culminating points that he shows much strength; and then it is the strength of passion, not of reason. Indeed, I do not know but it should rather be called weakness. He puts his characters in situations where the heart that has a drop of hot blood in it finds it easier to be strong than weak. His heroes show that fitful strength which grows out of intense excitement rather than healthy muscular action; it does not rise with the difficulty or danger they are in, and, looking down on it, assert calmly the unusurpable sovereignty of the soul, even after the flesh is overcome, but springs forward in an exulting gush of glorious despair to grapple with death and fate. In a truly noble bravery of soul, the interest is wholly the fruit of immortality; here it is the Sodom-apple of mortality. In the one case, we exult to see the infinite overshadow

and dwarf the finite; in the other, we cannot restrain a kind of romantic enthusiasm and admiration at seeing the weak clay so gallantly defy the overwhelming power which it well knows *must* crush it. High genius may be fiery and impetuous, but it can never bully and look big; it does not *defy* death and futurity; for a doubt of its monarchy over them never overflushed its serene countenance.

JOHN.

Shakspeare's characters seem to modify his plots as much as they are modified by them in turn. This may be the result of his unapproachable art; for art in him is but the tracing of nature to her primordial laws; is but nature precipitated, as it were, by the infallible test of philosophy. In his plays, as in life, there is a perpetual seesaw of character and circumstance, now one uppermost, now the other. Nature is never afraid to reason in a circle; we must let her assume her premises, and make our deductions logical accordingly. The actors in Shakspeare's dramas are only overcome by so much as they fall below their ideal, and are wanting in some attribute of true manhood. Wherever we go with him, the absence of a virtue always suggests its presence; the want of any nobleness makes us feel its beauty the more keenly.

PHILIP.

But Ford's heroes are strong only in their imperfections, and it is to these that whatever admiration

we yield them is paid. They interest us only so far as they can make us forget our quiet, calm ideal. This is the very stamp of weakness. We should be surprised if we saw them show any natural greatness. They are morbid and unhealthy; for, in truth, what we call greatness and nobleness is but entire health; to those only who are denaturalized themselves does it seem wonderful; to the natural man they are as customary and unconscious as the beating of his heart, or the motion of his lungs, and as necessary. Therefore it is that praise always surprises and humbles true genius; the shadow of earth comes then between them and their starry ideal with a cold and dark eclipse. In Ford's characters, the sublimity, if there be any, is that of a defiant despair.

JOHN.

The great genius may fail, but it is never thus. In him the spirit often overbalances the body, and sets its ideal too far beyond the actual. Unable to reach that, he seems to do less than many a one of less power; for the performance of any thing lower than what he has marked out for himself carries with it a feeling almost of degradation, that dispirits him. His wings may be too weak to bear him to that infinite height; but if he fail, he is an angel still, and falls not so low as the proudest pitch of talent. His failures are successful compared with the successes of others. But not to himself do they seem so; though, at his earth-dwindling height, he show like a star to the eyes of the world, what is it to him while he be-

holds the golden gates of his aspiration, above him still, fast shut and barred immitigably? Yet high genius has that in it which makes that its longings can never wholly be fruitless; its utmost imperfection has some touch of the perfect in it.

PHILIP.

The slavery of the character to the incident in Ford's plays has often reminded me of that story of the travellers, who lost their way in the mummy-pits, and who were all forced to pass through the same narrow orifice, which gave ready way to the slender but through which the stout were obliged to wriggle and squeeze with a desperate forgetfulness of bulk. It may be foolish for a philosopher, but it is wisdom in a dramatist, to follow the example of nature, who always takes care to make large holes for her large cats, and small holes for her small ones. Ford, perhaps, more than any of his contemporaries deserves the name of *sentimental*. He has not the stately gravity and antique majesty of Chapman, the wild imagination or even the tenderness of Webster, the precise sense of Jonson, the homeliness of Heywood, nor the delicate apprehension and silver tongue of Fletcher, but he has more sentiment than all of them put together. The names of his plays show the bent of his mind: "Love's Sacrifice," "The Lover's Melancholy," and "The Broken Heart," are the names of three of the best; and there is another in which the doctrine of the elective affinities is laid down broadly enough to

have shocked even Goethe. His personal appearance seems to have answered well enough to what I have surmised of his character. A contemporary thus graphically describes him:

> "Deep in a dump John Ford was alone gat,
> With folded arms *and melancholy hat.*"

A couplet which brings up the central figure on the title-page to the old edition of the "Anatomy of Melancholy" very vividly before our eyes. His dependence on things out of himself is shown also in his historical play of "Perkin Warbeck," in which, having no very exciting plot to sustain him, he is very gentlemanly and very dull. He does not furnish so many isolated passages which are complete in themselves, a quality remarkable in the old dramatists, among whom only Shakspeare united perfectness of the parts with strict adaptation and harmony of the whole. A play of Shakspeare's seems like one of those basaltic palaces whose roof is supported by innumerable pillars, each formed of many crystals perfect in themselves. To give you a fair idea of Ford, I will give a sketch of the plot of his most famous tragedy, with a few extracts.

The plot of "The Broken Heart" is simply this: Ithocles, the favorite of Amyclas, king of Laconia, instigated by an ancient feud with Orgilus, the betrothed of his sister Penthea, has forced her to break the match and marry Bassanes. Orgilus, full of an intent to revenge himself at the first chance, pretends a reconcilement with Ithocles, who, mean-

while, has repented of the wrong he had done, and moreover loves and is beloved by Calantha, the king's daûghter. Penthea dies mad. Orgilus murders Ithocles on the eve of his marriage with Calantha, who dies of a broken heart, after naming Nearchus, a former suitor, her successor to the throne. The following scene has great purity and beauty, and withal much sentimentalism in it. Orgilus, in the disguise of a scholar (a disguise as common now as then), has gained speech of Penthea. I read only the last part of the scene:

"*Org.* All pleasures are but mere imagination,
Feeding the hungry appetite with steam,
And sight of banquet, whilst the body pines,
Not relishing the real taste of food:
Such is the leanness of a heart, divided
From intercourse of troth-contracted loves;
No horror should deface that precious figure
Sealed with the lively stamp of equal souls.

"*Pen.* Away! some fury hath bewitched thy tongue:
The breath of ignorance that flies from thence
Ripens a knowledge in me of afflictions,
Above all sufferance. — Thing of talk, begone,
Begone, without reply!

"*Org.* Be just, Penthea,
In thy commands; when thou send'st forth a doom
Of banishment, know first on whom it lights.
Thus I take off the shroud, in which my cares
Are folded up from view of common eyes.
[*Throws off his scholar's dress.*
What is thy sentence next?

"*Pen.* Rash man! thou lay'st
A blemish on mine honor, with the hazard

Of thy too desperate life ; yet I profess,
By all the laws of ceremonious wedlock,
I have not given admittance to one thought
Of female change, since cruelty enforced
Divorce betwixt my body and my heart
Why would you fall from goodness thus ?

" *Org.* O, rather
Examine me, how I could live to say
I have been much, much wronged. 'T is for thy sake
I put on this imposture ; dear Penthea,
If thy soft bosom be not turned to marble,
Thou 'lt pity our calamities ; my interest
Confirms me, thou art mine still.

" *Pen.* Lend your hand ;
With both of mine I clasp it thus, thus kiss it,
Thus kneel before ye.

[PENTHEA *kneels.*

" *Org.* You instruct my duty.

[ORGILUS *kneels.*

" *Pen.* We may stand up. [*They rise.*] Have you aught else to urge
Of new demand? as for the old, forget it ;
'T is buried in an everlasting silence,
And shall be, shall be ever : what more would you?

" *Org.* I would possess my wife; the equity
Of very reason bids me.

" *Pen.* Is that all?

" *Org.* Why, 't is the all of me, myself.

" *Pen.* Remove
Your steps some distance from me; at this pace
A few words I dare change ; but first put on
Your borrowed shape.

" *Org.* You are obeyed; 't is done.

[*He resumes his disguise.*

"*Pen.* How, Orgilus, by promise, I was thine,
The heavens do witness; they can witness, too,
A rape done on my truth: how I do love thee
Yet, Orgilus, and yet, must best appear
In tendering thy freedom; for I find
The constant preservation of thy merit,
By thy not daring to attempt my fame
With injury of any loose conceit,
Which might give deeper wounds to discontents.
Continue this fair race; then, though I cannot
Add to thy comfort, yet I shall more often
Remember from what fortune I am fallen,
And pity mine own ruin. Live, live happy,
Happy in thy next choice, that thou may'st people
This barren age with virtues in thy issue!
And, O, when thou art married, think on me
With mercy, not contempt; I hope thy wife,
Hearing my story, will not scorn my fall. —
Now let us part.

"*Org.* Part! yet advise thee better:
Penthea is the wife to Orgilus,
And ever shall be.

"*Pen.* Never shall, nor will.

"*Org.* How!

"*Pen.* Hear me; in a word I 'll tell thee why,
The virgin-dowry which my birth bestowed,
Is ravished by another; my true love
Abhors to think, that Orgilus deserved
No better favors than a second bed.

"*Org.* I must not take this reason.

"*Pen.* To confirm it;
Should I outlive my bondage, let me meet
Another worse than this, and less desired,
If, of all men alive, thou shouldst but touch

My lip or hand again!
" *Org.* Penthea, now
I tell you, you grow wanton in my sufferance;
Come, sweet, thou art mine.
" *Pen.* Uncivil Sir, forbear,
Or I can turn affection into vengeance;
Your reputation, if you value any,
Lies bleeding at my feet. Unworthy man,
If ever henceforth thou appear in language,
Message, or letter, to betray my frailty,
I'll call thy former protestations lust,
And curse my stars for forfeit of my judgment.
Go thou, fit only for disguise, and walks,
To hide thy shame; this once I spare thy life.
I laugh at mine own confidence; my sorrows
By thee are made inferior to my fortunes:
If ever thou didst harbour worthy love,
Dare not to answer. My good genius guide me,
That I may never see thee more! — Go from me!
" *Org.* I'll tear my veil of politic French off,
And stand up like a man resolved to do: —
Action, not words, shall show me. — O Penthea!
[*Exit.*
" *Pen.* He sighed my name sure, as he parted from me;
I fear I was too rough. Alas, poor gentleman!
He looked not like the ruins of his youth,
But like the ruins of those ruins. Honor,
How much we fight with weakness to preserve thee!
[*Walks aside.*"

To my mind, Penthea's last speech is the best part of the scene. In the first part she shows an apparently Roman virtue, but there seems to be a savor of

prudery, and a suspicion of its own strength in it, which a truly courageous honor and chastity would be the last to entertain.

None of our dramatists but Shakspeare have been able to paint madness. Most of their attempts that way are failures; they grow silly and mopingly sentimental; they utter a great deal of such stuff as nobody in his senses would utter, and as nobody out of them could have the ingenious leisure to invent. Here is a specimen of Ford's mania:

"*Pen.* Sure, if we were all sirens, we should sing pitifully,
And 't were a comely music, when in parts
One sung another's knell; the turtle sighs
When he hath lost his mate; and yet some say
He must be dead first: 't is a fine deceit
To pass away in a dream! indeed, I 've slept
With mine eyes open a great while. No falsehood
Equals a broken faith; there 's not a hair
Sticks on my head but, like a leaden plummet,
It sinks me to the grave; I must creep thither;
The journey is not long.

. . . . . .

"*Pen.* Spare your hand;
Believe me, I 'll not hurt it.
"*Org.* My heart too.
"*Pen.* Complain not though I wring it hard: I 'll kiss it;
O, 't is a fine, soft palm! — hark, in thine ear;
Like whom do I look, prithee? — nay, no whispering.
Goodness! we had been happy; too much happiness
Will make folk proud, they say — but that is he —
[*Pointing to* ITHOCLES.

And yet he paid for 't home ; alas ! his heart
Is crept into the cabinet of the princess ;
We shall have points and bride-laces. Remember,
When we last gathered roses in the garden,
I found my wits ; but truly you lost yours.
That 's he, and still 't is he.
[*Again pointing to* ITHOCLES."

Now let us turn to the catastrophe. Calantha, after settling the succession of the kingdom, turns to the body of Ithocles.

" *Cal.* Forgive me : — now I turn to thee, thou shadow
Of my contracted lord ! Bear witness all,
I put my mother's wedding-ring upon
His finger; 't was my father's last bequest.
[*Places a ring on the finger of* ITHOCLES.
Thus I new-marry him, whose wife I am ;
Death shall not separate us. O my Lords,
I but deceived your eyes with antic gesture,
When one news straight came huddling on another,
Of death ! and death ! and death ! still I danced forward ;
But it struck home, and here, and in an instant.
Be such mere women, who, with shrieks and outcries,
Can vow a present end to all their sorrows,
Yet live to [court] new pleasures, and outlive them :
They are the silent griefs which cut the heart-strings ;
Let me die smiling.
" *Near.* 'T is a truth too ominous.
" *Cal.* One kiss on these cold lips, my last ! —[*Kisses* ITHOCLES.] — crack, crack —
Argos now 's Sparta's king. Command the voices
Which wait at th' altar now to sing the song
I fitted for my end."

Lamb speaks of this death-scene as "carrying us back to Calvary and the cross" (or uses words to that effect), but this, it seems to me, is attributing too much importance to the mere physical fact of dying.

JOHN.

What one dies for, not his dying, glorifies him. The comparison is an irreverent one, as that must need be which matches a selfish love with a universal. Love's nobility is shown in this, that it strengthens us to make sacrifices for others, and not for the object of our love alone. All the good we do is a service done to that, but that is not the sole recipient. Our love for one is only, therefore, made preëminent that it may show us the beauty and holiness of that love whose arms are wide enough for all. It is easy enough to die for one we love so fiercely; but it is a harder and nobler martyrdom to live for others. Love is only then perfected, when it can bear to outlast the body, which was but its outward expression, and a prop for its infant steps, and can feel its union with the beloved spirit in a mild serenity, and an inward prompting to a thousand little unrewarded acts of every-day brotherhood. The love of one is a mean, not an end.

PHILIP.

Another objection which I should feel inclined to bring against this scene is that the breaking of Calantha's heart seems to be made too palpable and anatomical an event. It is too much like the mere

bursting of a blood-vessel, which Smith or Brown might accomplish, though wholly incapable of rendering themselves tragically available by the breaking of their hearts. It is like that stanza of the old ballad,

> "She turned her back unto the wall,
> And her face unto the rock;
> And there, *before her mother's eyes,*
> *Her very heart it broke.*"

In the ballad, however, there is more propriety; the heroine's heart gives way suddenly, under a sudden blow. But Calantha saves up her heartbreak, as it were, until it can come in with proper effect at the end of the tragedy.

Ford sometimes reminds one of the picturesque luxuriance of Fletcher. The following exquisite passage is very like Fletcher, and is a good specimen of Ford's lighter powers. When we read it we almost wish he had writen masques or pastorals rather than plays. The story is an old one, and was translated by Crashawe in a poem which for exquisite rhythm and diction can hardly be paralleled in the language. Ford brings it in in his "Lover's Melancholy":

> "One morning early
> This accident encountered me: I heard
> The sweetest and most ravishing contention
> That art and nature ever were at strife in.
> A sound of music touched mine ears, or rather,

Indeed, entranced my soul: as I stole nearer,
Invited by the melody, I saw
This youth, this fair-faced youth, upon his lute,
With strains of strange variety and harmony,
Proclaiming, as it seemed, so bold a challenge
To the clear choristers of the woods, the birds,
That, as they flocked about him, all stood silent,
Wondering at what they heard: I wondered too.
. . . . . A nightingale
Nature's best-skilled musician, undertakes
The challenge, and, for every several strain
The well-shaped youth could touch, she sang her own;
He could not run division with more art
Upon his quaking instrument, than she,
The nightingale, did with her various notes
Reply to; for a voice and for a sound,
Amethus, 't is much easier to believe
That such they were, than hope to hear again.
Some time thus spent, the young man grew at last
Into a pretty anger, that a bird,
Whom art had never taught clefs, moods, and notes,
Should vie with him for mastery, whose study
Had busied many hours to perfect practice:
To end the controversy, in a rapture
Upon his instrument he plays so swiftly,
So many voluntaries and so quick,
That there was curiosity and cunning,
Concord and discord, lines of differing method
Meeting in one full centre of delight.
. . . . . The bird, ordained to be
Music's first martyr, strove to imitate
These several sounds; which, when her warbling throat
Failed in, for grief, down dropped she on his lute
And brake her heart!"

I must give you a short passage from Crashawe's poem, which I cannot help thinking the best music in words I ever read. Crashawe was himself an exquisite musician. After the lutanist has played a strain, the nightingale answers:

"She measures every measure, everywhere
Meets art with art; sometimes, as if in doubt
Not perfect yet, and fearing to be out,
Wails her plain ditty in one long-spun note,
Through the sleek passage of her open throat,
A clear, unwrinkled song; then doth she point it
With tender accents, and severely joint it
By short diminutives, that, being reared
In controverting warbles evenly shared,
With her sweet self she wrangles.

. . . .

"Her supple breast thrills out
Sharp airs, and *staggers in a warbling doubt*
Of dallying sweetness, hovers o'er her skill,
And folds in waved notes, with a trembling bill,
The pliant series of her slippery song:
Then starts she suddenly into a throng
Of short, thick sobs, ...
That roll themselves over her lubric throat
In panting murmurs 'stilled out of her breast,
That ever-bubbling spring, the sugared nest
Of her delicious soul, that there doth lie,
Bathing in streams of liquid melody;
Music's best seed-plot, when in ripened airs
A golden-headed harvest fairly rears
Its honey-dropping tops, ploughed by her breath."

JOHN.

May we neither of us ever hear a nightingale! — No, I recall so rash a prayer; but, after this, we should surely think his music harsh. Even the extravagant metaphor with which your extract ended is forced upon us as natural and easy by the foregoing enthusiasm.

PHILIP.

Now that the nightingale has enticed us out of doors, you will like to hear Ford's praise of Spring. Raybright asks Spring:

"What dowry can you bring me?
"*Spring.* Dowry?
Is 't come to this! am I held poor and base?
A girdle make whose buckles, stretched their length,
Shall reach from the Arctic to the Antarctic pole;
What ground soe'er thou canst with that inclose
I'll give thee freely: *Not a lark that calls*
The morning up shall build on any turf
But she shall be thy tenant, call thee lord,
And for his rent pay thee in change of songs."
The Sun's Darling.

And again:

"O my dear love, the spring, I 'm cheated of thee!
Thou hadst a body, the four elements
Dwelt never in a fairer; a mind princely;
Thy language, like thy singers, musical.
How cool wast thou in anger! In thy diet
How temperate and yet sumptuous! *thou 'dst not waste*
The weight of a sad violet in excess,

Yet still thy board had dishes numberless ;
Dumb beasts, even, loved thee ; once a young lark
Sat on thy hand and, gazing on thine eyes,
Mounted and sang, thinking them moving skies."

Ibid.

Now I will gather you a handful of flowers from the rest of the plays and close the volume. Here is a pretty illustration of the doctrine of sympathies :

" The constant loadstone and the steel are found
In several mines ; yet there is such a league
Between these minerals, as if one vein
Of earth had nourished both. The gentle myrtle
Is not engraft upon the olive's stock ;
Yet nature hath between them locked a secret
Of sympathy that, being planted near,
They will, both in their branches and their roots,
Embrace each other ; twines of ivy round
The well-grown oak ; the vine doth court the elm ;
Yet these are different plants."

The Lover's Melancholy.

The end of a wasted life is thus touchingly set forth :

" Minutes are numbered by the fall of sands,
As by an hour-glass ; the span of time
Doth waste us to our graves, and we look on it :
An age of pleasures revelled out, comes home
At last and ends in sorrow ; but the life,
Weary of riot, numbers every sand,
Wailing in sighs until the last drop down
So to conclude calamity in rest."

Ibid.

JOHN.

The rhythm of these lines is finely managed; there is a sadness and weariness in the flow of the verse which sinks gradually into the quiet of the exquisitely-modulated last line.

PHILIP.

I will read a few more fragments without remark.

"Busy opinion is an idle fool,
That, as a school-rod keeps a child in awe,
Frights the inexperienced temper of the mind."

Ibid.

"Let upstarts exercise unmanly roughness;
Clear spirits to the humble will be humble."

Lady's Trial.

"*The sweetest freedom is an honest heart.*"

Ibid.

You will relish this itemed account of a poor man's revenues:

"What lands soe'er the world's surveyor, the sun,
Can measure in a day, I dare call mine;
All kingdoms I have right to; I am free
Of every country; in the four elements
I have as deep share as an emperor;
All beasts which the earth bears are to serve me,
All birds to sing to me; and can you catch me
With a tempting golden apple?"

The Sun's Darling.

This thought is noble:

> " He cannot fear
> Who builds on noble grounds ; sickness or pain
> Is the deserver's exercise."
>
> *The Broken Heart.*

And, with this good speech on his lips, John Ford makes his exit from the stage of our little private theatre.

JOHN.

I have spent a pleasant evening; and if I do not yet admire your old favorites as much as you do, it is because I do not know them so well. It has been my happy experience in life to find some lovable quality in every human being I have known, and to find more with more knowledge; may it be so with the Old Dramatists!

THE END.

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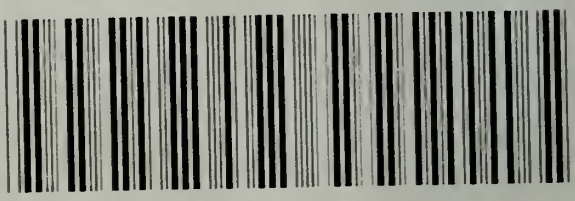

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